The Psalms of Israel

A Study of the Setting and Meaning of Selected Psalms



Jack Burch

Copyright © 2012
Jack Burch
All Rights Reserved

For additional information contact:
Jack Burch
1204 Mission Verde Drive
Camarillo, CA 93012

Table of Contents

Chapter	Title	Page
	Preface	3
I	Introduction to the Psalms of Israel	4
II	The Hymns Psalms: 8, 19, 103, 136, 148	26
III	Psalms of Individual Lament Psalms: 42, 43, 51, 61, 63, 64, 70	41
IV	Psalms of Community Lament Psalms: 14, 58, 83, 85, 123, 137	63
V	Psalms of Wisdom Psalms: 1, 49, 73, 127	84
VI	Psalms of Zion – Enthronement Psalms Psalms: 46, 47, 93, 122	95
VII	Psalms of Community Thanksgiving Psalms: 67, 75, 124	104
VIII	Psalms of Individual Thanksgiving Psalms: 9, 10, 30, 32	110
IX	Psalms of Trust Psalms: 11, 16, 23	123
X	Royal Psalms Psalms: 2, 21, 110	135
	Appendices	153
	Bibliography	156

Preface

When we open the Bible in the middle, we see the book of Psalms. Though not designed for this purpose, it is appropriate that the Book of Psalms is in the center because in some ways this book gives us our most vivid description of God and of ourselves. The psalmists describe the Lord as transcendent – beyond our reach – because he is the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent one who is the Sovereign of the universe and heaven. Yet, he is the immanent one – never far away – who is approachable, dynamically involved with his people, one who listens intently to their pleas, and is patient with their weaknesses. The Psalms, as no other part of Scripture, introduce us to God.

All of us – no matter our circumstance, our successes or failures, our victories or defeats, our spiritual strengths or weaknesses – can find ourselves within this collection of Israel's one hundred fifty poems. Every emotion we experience in life is experienced by these psalmists. They express their love for God and their frustrations with Him. We see the strength of their faith as well as their doubts and weakness. We share in their awe as they contemplate God's greatness. We also share their comfort as they cast their cares on him. They pray with thanksgiving, they learn to live with uncertainty, they celebrate their successes, they question God's seeming inaction, and contritely ask for his forgiveness. The Psalms come to life in the experiences of each of us particularly as we see the conflicts and the contradictions in the lives of the psalmists and in our own lives as well.

Insofar as possible, I have tried to view each psalm in its cultural, religious, political, and social contexts. With a few of the Psalms we can get a glimpse into the historical circumstances but these psalms are few in number. The messages which these poems carried to the original readers are of first importance. Failure to give these their proper study robs us of the essence of the psalm. Too many times the tendency is to go quickly to the "contemporary application" of the text without first undertaking the study of its situation in the lives of the original audience. Two major undesirable consequences arise out of this approach. First, we miss the real message to the original audience and consequently we fail to see what the psalmist had in his mind. Second, when we ignore the original context we are almost bound to misapply the message in our own contemporary setting.

Technical scholarship has helped us understand some of the forms and structure of the psalms. In addition, a better understanding of the nature of Hebrew poetry has enhanced our understanding of the texts themselves. In selecting the psalms to be discussed I have chosen some from every general category, and have included psalms which are representative of each of these groups. Most of the very long psalms were avoided, *e.g.* Ps. 119, so that a greater number of psalms could be included in the study. I have tried to incorporate a reasonable amount of academic material with the devotional material so that a variety of points of view – both liberal and conservative - could be seen.

Chapter I
Introduction to
The Psalms of Israel

Introduction

Songs have always been used by individuals and the community of believers in the worship of God. Song writers in both ancient and modern times have attempted to capture the feelings, emotions, needs, and frustrations of people and nations. Through many ages musicians and poets have combined to create imagery in words and in appropriate music to give expression to almost every thought and feeling of worshippers. The Biblical Psalms played a prominent role in the temple worship of Israel and in the lives of individuals. In this we see their great liturgical, community, and individual value in worship and life.

Ancient Psalms in Israel

The poetry of Israel is not limited to the book of Psalms. Approximately 40% of the Old Testament was written in poetic form. From the inception of the nation at the time of the Exodus until the time of Christ, psalms continually played an important role in Israel's national life and in the personal lives of many of its people. Psalmody was the primary oral and literary mode of expression of Israel's sorrow, joy, worship, celebration, love, hatred, and almost every other human emotion.

The book of Psalms, more than any other book in the Bible, allows us to participate in the moods and feelings of these writers. One of the keys to a fruitful study of the Psalms is to allow ourselves to understand and enter into the humanity of these writers as their experiences probe our own feelings from jubilation, gratitude, and praise to those of sorrows, fears, heartaches and sins.

Long before the psalms became a collection in book form, Israel expressed itself in poetic fashion. Our first exposure to this is the song of Moses and the Israelites in Exodus 15:1-18. This is frequently referred to as Miriam's Song although Ex. 15:1 says that "Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord." No composer is mentioned but in Ex. 15:20-21 there is a repetition of the first four lines of the song of Moses and Israel. Miriam sang it to all the women as they danced and took up tambourines in celebration of the crossing of the Red Sea.

Various Old Testament scholars have given titles to many of the psalms which arose during Israel's early history. The song of Moses and Israel has been entitled "The Song of the Sea" since it was sung in celebration of Israel's crossing the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army. Throughout the Old Testament there are psalms which were not included in the Psalter but are recorded as part of Israel's history. Peter Craigie has given some of them the following titles:

The Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:1-18)
The Song of the Ark (Num. 10:35-36
The Oracles of Balaam (Num. 23-24)
The Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-44)

The Blessing of Moses (Deut. 33:2-29)
The Song of Deborah (Judg. 5:1-31)
The Prayer of Hannah (I Sam. 2:1-10)
The Lament of David (II Sam. 1:17-27)
The Oracle of Isaiah Against Sennacherib (II Kgs.19:21-34)

(Peter Craigie, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 19, *Psalms 1-50*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher), 1998, on CD.)

In these poems we see songs of joy, songs of celebration, songs of lament, and prophetic utterances. Many of the psalms of Israel were put to music and sung by an individual or a group.

Titles and Superscriptions in the Psalms

The superscriptions are notations which accompany one hundred sixteen of the psalms. They are located just above the text itself. In some modern editions of the Hebrew Bible these are incorporated into the text, and are now considered to be part of the text itself. However, the superscriptions are actually the additions of an editor or compiler and should not be shown as part of the text of the psalm. Even so, they probably should not be ignored or set aside without good reason. Scholars are divided concerning the value of these superscriptions, some considering them to be mere legend while others believe that they frequently provide reasonable historical settings which are valuable. They probably represent honest devout attempts to place particular psalms into their important historical or personal contexts. Since we do not know the authors, dates, or circumstances of these superscriptions it is difficult to estimate their value. The practice of using such titles outside of the book of Psalms itself is seen in the text of David's psalm in II Sam. 22:1 and the psalm of Hezekiah in Is. 38:9. The book of Habakkuk is poetry and it has a descriptive title in Hab. 3:1 and 3:19 but these are subscription rather than superscriptions.

In general the superscriptions may contain as many as five types of material. First, there is the identification of the persons or groups associated with the writing of the psalm as in Ps. 3, 72, and 90. Second, there may be historical information as in Ps. 18, 34, and 51. Third, there may be musical information as in Psalms 4 and 5, speaking of the instruments which are to accompany their use. The meaning of many of these technical terms is still unknown. Fourth, liturgical information may be included as in Ps. 38 and 100. Fifth, some superscriptions designate the type of poem such as a hymn or a song as in Ps. 120 and 145. Variations of these superscriptions were included in some of the earliest versions of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint (LXX) and the Syriac.

Some Musical and Technical Terms in the Superscriptions

Songs. From some of the explanations in I and II Chronicles we know of the use of musical instruments and choirs of singers in the temple rituals. Some information can be found in I Chron. 15:16, 16:4-6, 16:42, II Chron. 5:12-13, and II Chron. 29:25. Scholars have concluded that the psalms which are spoken of as "songs" were probably to be sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments but we do not always know the structure or type of instruments of which the writer is speaking.

Miktan. This term is used six times, but its meaning is unknown. Scholars believe it may refer to penitential type psalms.

Maskil. This term is used thirteen times, and its meaning is also questionable. The psalms which are associated with *Maskil* are thought to have been primarily "teaching psalms" but there are exceptions to this.

Song of Ascents. There are several possibilities here. The psalms with this superscription have a few things in common. These common elements have caused scholars to conclude that these are psalms descriptive of people who are going up to Jerusalem. This may refer to pilgrims or returning exiles. The term is also used regarding the Levites ascending the steps of the temple to perform their services. Musical terms and directions also appear in some of the superscriptions. Examples of these are "For the leader," "With stringed instruments," and "With wind instruments." The meaning however is unclear.

The Collection and Structure of Psalms

As we read the book of Psalms we cannot help but wonder when and by whom it was compiled. Most contemporary churches have hymnals or songbooks for use in worship. The words of these hymns have been composed by a variety of poets over many years and were collected by an editor and publisher. The life experiences of the poets and the historical backgrounds of these hymns differ from one to the other. Our knowledge of the author and his background contributes immeasurably to our understanding of the message of the poem and the mind of the poet. It appears that a similar process may have taken place in the Biblical collection of the Psalms. We must see this fact in light of the Biblical teaching of inspiration of Scripture but we must also remember that God used the experiences, needs, and petitions of the writers and the community of believers (Israel) to communicate his will. Just as Paul's experiences entered into his writings, so also the experiences of Israel and the psalmists entered into the writings of the Psalms.

The word "Psalm" is from the Greek word ψαλμος (*psalmos*) which means a "song or music." For the Hebrews this could be either instrumental or vocal or a combination of the two. Thus the book of Psalms is truly Israel's *Book of Songs* but it is more than just a collection of songs. It is a collection of prayers, laments, songs of praise, liturgy, wisdom poetry, and other types of psalmody. Some were written very early in Israel's history while others come from very late periods. Thus they come from a variety of historical, social, political, religious, and economic backgrounds. This presents an almost endless variety of feelings and emotions of individuals, of a small community, and of the nation as a whole and it greatly enriches our experience as we study the psalms and contemplate their messages.

The book of Psalms is divided into five collections or "books." This arrangement is thought by many scholars to be quite artificial. No one knows the circumstances or criteria used in the process of forming these five collections. Scholars are also divided concerning the relationship which each psalm has to the other psalms within the particular book (collection). It is generally thought that these five books were originally separate collections which were later brought together in their present form. There is evidence of such collections of poetic material in *The Book*

of the Wars of the Lord (Num. 21:14) and in *The Book of Jashar* (II Sam. 1:17-18). However, John T. Willis, when writing about the preaching value of the Psalms stated, "The editors of the Psalter arranged this work in its present final form intentionally. They did not present the book of Psalms as a narrative, but they carefully connected each psalm in a meaningful theological arrangement." (John Willis, "How the Psalms are Important in Preaching," *Leaven*, vol. 19, quarter 3, D'Esta Love and Stuart Love, editors, (Malibu: Pepperdine University), 2011), p. 128). Other scholars argue that there is very little relationship between the psalms within each of the books. There are exceptions to this, most notable of which is the identification of authorship in some of the superscriptions.

The collector(s) of these five books and the time of collection are both unknown, although most scholars believe that the collection took its present form by about the fourth century B.C. The five books in the collection are as follows:

Book I consists of Psalms 1-41
Book II consists of Psalms 42-72
Book III consists of Psalms 73-89
Book IV consists of Psalms 90-106
Book V consists of Psalms 107-150.

At the end of each of the "books" is a doxology. Psalm 150, the last psalm in the Book of Psalms, forms a sort of doxology for the entire collection, and is generally thought of as a doxology in its entirety.

In forty-three of the Psalms the Hebrew personal name of God is used, and in about one hundred psalms the general word *Elohim* is used for God. Scholars do not know the reasons for this, and none of the theories has gained general acceptance in the scholarly world. James L. Mays makes some important observations concerning the use of the words God and LORD in the Psalms. LORD, spelled out in the translations in all capital letters, refers to the Hebrew name of God while the word Lord (not spelled in all capital letters) is the word meaning the master or sir. The LORD is portrayed as "the One enthroned in heaven" who laughs and scoffs as the nations which conspire against him. The psalmist sees the LORD saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." (Ps. 2:1-6) There is little doubt that the people of that day interpreted this to refer to the Davidic king in Jerusalem, but the New Testament writer of Hebrews sees in it a symbolic meaning referring to Christ. See Heb. 1:5. (James L. Mays, *Psalms: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville: John Knox Press), 1989, pp. 30-31.)

The psalms of David are said to end with Psalms 72 where we find the statement, "This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse," Ps. 72:20. However, Psalms 72 is attributed to Solomon. The authenticity of this statement has been called into question since some later superscriptions attribute various psalms to David. See Ps. 86, 101, 103, 108, 109, 110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, and 145. It may be that the writer of the subscription of Ps. 72:20 was only referring to the psalms in "Book II." There also appears to have been a conscious effort to group some of David's psalms together. Various superscriptions attribute certain groups of psalms to David. They are Ps. 3-41 (except Ps. 33), Ps. 51-70 (except Ps. 66-67), and

Ps. 138-145. Throughout the Psalter a total of seventy-three psalms are attributed to David although the collections just cited constitute only sixty-four psalms. The remainder are scattered through the various collections.

In "Book III," Ps. 73-83, are attributed to Asaph. Earlier in "Book II" Ps. 50 is also attributed to him. He is mentioned a number of times in the historical books of the Old Testament where he is identified as a Levite musician during the time of David (I Chron. 15:17-19, 16:4-5). It appears that his descendants carried on the family tradition, Ez. 3:10.

There appears to have been two collections of *The Psalms of Korah.* Some are found in "Book II," in Ps. 42-49 (except Ps. 43) and in portions of "Book III" and "Book IV." These are Ps. 84-88 (except Ps. 86). Korah was a Levite who was a descendant of Kohath (I Chron. 6:16, 22). In I Chron. 6:31-32 it appears that he and his descendants may have been included with some others who were involved in the temple music at the time of David. From superscriptions throughout the Book of Psalms twelve of the seventy-three which are attributed to David mention an event which evoked the writing of that particular psalm. We must remember that the authenticity of these superscriptions cannot be verified and scholars still debate them.

Regarding the general time of writing, the psalms separate themselves into two very broad divisions. These are the preexilic psalms and the postexilic psalms. The fact that some psalms refer to an Israelite king means that they were preexilic since there was no king after the exile. At least one psalm, Ps. 137, reflects the period of the exile itself and at least one speaks of the return of some of the exiles, Ps. 126. Most of the individual poems in the book appear to have a unique message coming out of unique circumstances or events although it is usually difficult or impossible to identify either the time or the event.

The book of Psalms therefore presents a different hermeneutical challenge than the historical, wisdom, or prophetic literature of the Old Testament. Since we do not know the exact historical background of most of the Psalms, we have to rely on their content for small bits of information which sometimes guides us toward a general time period. The content may also provide important historical information especially if it is supported by the information in the superscription. This may help us gain a little clearer understanding of the message in the mind of the psalmist.

Date and Authorship of the Psalms.

As previously observed, very few of the psalms can be dated except to say that some show evidence of early Hebrew history, some during the United Monarchy, some just prior to the Exile (before 598 B.C.), some during the exilic period (598-538 B.C.), and others are postexilic (after 538 B.C.). We must remember that the Babylonian Exile did not begin with the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. In the eighth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar the first of the exiles were deported to Babylon, II Kgs. 24:8-14. This means that the exilic period actually began about 598 B.C. and the final invasion and destruction of Jerusalem took place eleven years later in 587 B.C. The edict of Cyrus came about 538 B.C. allowing the captive people to return to their home countries. Generally however the exile is dated from the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. to the

edict of Cyrus in 538 B.C. Psalm 137 is certainly dated during the exile and Ps. 126 can be dated during the period of return of some of the Jews from the exile.

As stated above, in the Hebrew texts there are seventy-three psalms attributed to David but that number is slightly more in the LXX. The words translated "of David" can also be translated "to David," "belonging to David," or "for David." This has caused some scholars to conclude that there are fewer psalms which were actually written by David than is popularly believed. Perhaps this means that some of the psalms were stimulated by David but composed by another person. In addition, some of the psalms attributed to David refer to the temple which did not exist during his lifetime. It should be noted however that the Tabernacle was sometime referred to as a temple as in I Sam. 1:9, 3:3. Although the Tabernacle at Shiloh had been destroyed by the time of David, in II Sam. 22:7 he calls out to God saying, "From his temple he heard my voice." Julius Wellhausen (1884-1918) and a few other scholars at one time thought that the majority of the Psalms were post-exilic but this theory has been abandoned. The fact remains that many of the psalms cannot be dated at all and for many others the dates are quite speculative.

Because some of the psalms were written during and after the Babylonian Exile, a section dealing with conditions and life at that time is included in the chapter entitled, "Psalms of Community Lament." Scholars frequently use the word "lament" but it is important that we remember that they do not always use the word to depict sorrow or remorse. It is frequently attached to thanksgiving and trust along with an affirmation of the Lord's protection.

Problems of Authorship

The public generally refers to David as the author of the Psalms and the early Hebrews made a similar generalized statement. However, even a cursory reading will show that this is by no means an accurate conclusion. There are thirty-four psalms which have no identification of authorship, and are therefore anonymous. Content of a few psalms may help somewhat in identifying authorship but this is very subjective. The presence of titles or identification of authors in the remaining one hundred sixteen psalms may point a direction but they are not conclusive. David is mentioned most frequently, followed by Asaph, the sons of Korah, Moses, Solomon, Heman the Ezrahite, and Ethan the Ezrahite. More than fifty psalms are said to be "for the musical director." Since David is referred to as "Israel's singer of songs" (II Sam. 23:1) he is credited with many psalms. He appointed a variety of people to fill musical roles in worship (I Chron. 15:16-24, 16:7, 31, II Chron. 29:25-28), and he is later referred to as the one who had prescribed the use of certain musical instruments in worship and praise of God, Ezra 3:10 and Neh. 12:24. Thus he left a musical legacy in Israel. Since the authorship of the psalms cannot be accurately ascertained, it is best that we consider the majority as anonymous. This fact however, should never impede our study or respect for the psalms. After all, there are nine books in the New Testament which are anonymous.

Psalms which were written about the gods of the Canaanites, Sumerians, Egyptians, and Babylonians have been found in the Ras Shamra (Ugaritic text) discoveries and other historical documents of these nations. Scholars have shown how the Biblical psalms have parallel or similar expressions when compared with the poems of those nations. This is seen in Ps. 68, 74, and 82. However, the quality of the literary forms found in the Biblical psalms is superior to that of other

Middle Eastern nations of antiquity. On the other hand he distinctiveness of the Biblical psalms is not in their form but in their theology. This is seen in the fact that the pagan psalms tend to be more mythological and polytheistic in the way they deal with the nature of sin and forgiveness since these two components do not play a prominent role in pagan religions. There is therefore no concept of grace in paganism as is seen in Biblical theology.

Psalms, Poetry, and Hebrew Thought

We rightly believe that the Bible is God's word. Through its pages we hear his voice speaking to us, guiding, comforting, and instructing us. The psalms are different from this in many respects. In most of these poems we hear the voices of men as they speak to God. The psalmists are not a shy bunch. They disagree with God, they resent some of his actions, they thank him for his blessings and they express their reliance on his divine guidance. They also express their anger at their enemies, sometimes asking God to brutally punish their captors. They voice their dismay that the Lord has not taken action earlier. They express their doubts and fears. They tell of their love for his Law, they express their sorrows and disappointments. There is no human emotion which is not found in Israel's poetry both in the book of Psalms and in other psalms strewn through the history of Israel. When we see these poems from this vantage point we can understand and appreciate them much more deeply.

For Israel, as well as other ancient nations, poetry was an artful, common, and useful medium of expression. In ancient cultures the earliest poems were composed orally and were passed down from generation to generation in that form. They were frequently composed in celebration of a grand event such as a military victory as in "The Song of Deborah" (Judg. 5:1-31) or Israel's deliverance from bondage as in "The Song of the Sea" (Ex. 15:1-18).

Collecting poems and songs into "books" came relatively early in Israel. We have previously cited two of these. One is in Num. 21:14-15 known as *The Book of the Wars of the Lord* and the other is in II Sam. 1:17-27 known as *The Book of Jashar*. In both of these books poetry is cited. David said that his song of lament was to be placed in that book and to be taught to his men. We do not know the date of origin of either of these collections but they appear to have been very early in Israel's history. There can be little doubt that the custom of collecting such poetry played an important role in the compilation of the poetry we know as the book of Psalms. David's great hymn of praise for deliverance from his enemies (II Sam. 22:1-51) is also found in Ps. 18:1-50, although there are a few variations in the language.

Poetic Forms in the Psalms

Poetry from different cultures takes on different forms. English poetry is different from Korean, and Hebrew poetry is different from Greek poetry. Each has its own rhythm, cadence, rhyme, or other individual characteristics. Hebrew poetry is no exception. The words can be translated, and the raw message is the same. However, much is lost when any poem is translated from its original language into another language. For example the rhythm cannot be duplicated, and it is this factor which carries an important part of the feeling, poetic beauty, and emotional content of a psalm. Hebrew has its own native rhythm, parallelism and acrostic structure. Out of these, only the parallelism can be translated.

Lawrence E. Toombs says that parallelism is the most conspicuous characteristic of Hebrew poetry. Many of the Psalms and a great deal of other wisdom literature of the Old Testament demonstrate this. The term "parallelism" usually includes three types *i.e.* synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic.

Synonymous Parallelism

In synonymous parallelism there will be two statements which convey the same thought but in slightly different language.

In Ps. 1:2 we read:

> "But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
> and on his law he meditates day and night."

In Ps. 24:1 we read:

> "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof;
> the world and they that dwell therein."

Antithetic Parallelism

In antithetic parallelism there are two statements which convey opposite or near opposite thoughts.

In Ps. 1:6 we read:

> "For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
> but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

In Ps. 20:7 we read:

> "Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
> but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

Synthetic Parallelism

In synthetic parallelism the second line illuminates, augments, or extends the thought of the first line and the thought of the third line is a parallel to that of the first line. The fourth line (if there is one) then illuminates, augments, or extends the thought of the third line.
In Ps. 27:4 we see this clearly:

> One thing have I asked of the Lord,
> That will I seek after;
> That I may dwell in the house of the Lord
> All the days of my life.

Because synthetic parallelism is so similar to synonymous parallelism some scholars do not consider it as a separate form. There are various combinations of the parallelism form. Wisdom literature, particularly the book of Proverbs, has many of these. See Prov. 10-30.

Acrostic Structure

Acrostic structure means that each succeeding line of the poem begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This characteristic does not come through when a poem is translated from the Hebrew into another language. Examples of this structure are in Ps. 9, 25, 34, 37, 112, 119, and 145.

Classification of Psalms

There was a time when scholars concentrated on attempting to determine the exact historical period of writing of various Psalms. In many cases this involved authorship as well as date. Since this required very subjective speculation, scholars began seeing the futility of this pursuit. Therefore they moved in another and more productive direction by attempting to classify the psalms according to common structure and content. Psalms which shared similar structure and content formed a category while others which had different structure and content in common with each other were placed into a different category. As we study this method of classification it becomes evident that many subjective elements are still present but this is much more useful than trying to classify them by historical periods.

The categories can be useful in interpretation even though many of the Psalms might rightfully belong to more than one category. Scholars do not always agree concerning the classification of some of the psalms. However, the most important thing is not simply the classification but understanding the messages and theology of the psalms. Along with the beauty of the imagery expressed by the poet, the various psalmists present a rich picture of God who works in the lives of his people, assuring them of his fidelity as he fulfills his promises.

Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), a German scholar and Sigmund Mowinckel (1884-1965), a Norwegian scholar broke new ground in their study of the Psalms. Although their approaches were quite different, both classified the Psalms into groups or categories based, in part, on the general tenor of each psalm and the situation or setting in life. The situation in life's setting is expressed by the German phrase, *Sitz em Leben* which is used frequently in studies of background material. Some psalms are obviously psalms of praise, others, psalms of lament, others are royal psalms, etc. but there is a great deal of overlapping and it is here that the "situation in life" plays an important role in understanding the psalm. Gunkel's classifications are generally used by scholars today but there are variations among scholars and commentators. Gunkel attempted to show how the "situation in life" – S*itz em Leben* – produced the structure of the text of various psalms. This is based on the assumption that the social, religious, and historical setting gave rise to the basic structure and content of each psalm. Scholars attempt to characterize the *Sitz em Leben* from both content and structure of the psalm.

The classifications made by Gunkel are usually based on the structure of the psalm from a literary viewpoint and the *Sitz em Leben* (life situation) rather than from a strict content analysis of

the psalms itself. Each of his groups then had a particular manner of literary expression but in many cases they were also similar in content. This led to the conclusion that there were set forms or formal characteristics of the psalms in a given category. Gunkel's work became a sort of standard in the scholarly world.

A little later Sigmund Mowinckel (1884-1965) built on some of Gunkel's work. However, Mowinckel placed strong emphasis on what he considered to be the source of many of the psalms, *i.e.* the priestly school which scholars generally refer to as "the cult." He believed that about forty-three of the psalms were written as part of Israel's annual celebration of the enthronement of the Lord. See the discussion below under "The Enthronement of God." Although scholars have generally abandoned Mowinckel's thesis in this regard it cannot be denied that his work has had a strong impact on the study of the Psalms.

The groupings below and in Appendix "A" show some differences in the ways various scholars categorize the Psalms. Competent scholars use different classifications or categories. The categories below are from Arnold B. Rhodes. (Arnold B. Rhodes, *The Layman's Bible Commentary: The Book of Psalms*, vo. 9, (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press), 1960, pp. 21-25.) He follows the general categories of Hermann Gunkel but with some variations. See Appendix "A" and Appendix "B." Each of these categories is briefly described below.

Hymns of Praise

A hymn, as used in this classification, is a Psalm which centers on the praise of God. Generally it is made up of three parts; the introduction, the body of the psalm, and the conclusion. The introduction is usually a call to come and praise God, *i.e.* a call to worship. The body is a presentation of the reasons for praising him. This may consist of a description of the Lord's power, his character or kindness, his mercy, his justice, etc. The conclusion may be a repeat of specific parts of the introduction expressed in different language or it may just call on the reader to come and join in praise of God. Many of these psalms are thought to have been in celebration of a great religious festival such as the Feast of Tabernacles, Passover, Feast of Weeks, etc.

The Enthronement of God

This category is frequently referred to as the Kingship of God. These psalms describe the rule of God and were probably used at a number of the annual celebrations of Israel, *e.g.* the Feast of Harvest and the Feast of Tabernacles. However there is no indication that an annual "enthronement of the Lord" was celebrated among the Israelites as was characteristic of the Babylonians for Marduk, their primary god.

Sigmund Mowinckel believed that the priestly schools (the cult) wrote these psalms in much the same way as the Babylonian New Year's psalms originated. Mowinckel translated the expression "The Lord Reigns (Ps. 93:1, 96:10, 97:1, 99:1) as "The Lord has become king." A general picture of the Babylonian celebration is found in a Babylonian creation epic poem entitled *Enuma Elish*. In that epic poem Marduk, the god of the Babylonians, was enthroned and acknowledged to be the god and divine ruler. Mowinckel believed that some of the references in Old Testament history describe a celebration similar in Israel. Therefore he concluded that about

one-third of the psalms originated within the priestly group as a celebration of the annual enthronement of the Lord. In Mowinckel's thought this gave considerable emphasis to Israelite liturgy. Sexual ceremonies also accompanied the Babylonian liturgy but Mowinckel does not claim that for Israel's so-called celebration.

Arnold Rhodes gives a critical review of this and concludes by saying, "No doubt some of the Psalms are to be associated with the various festivals of Israel, but the theory of the Lord's enthronement, as it is often presented, rests too heavily on analogy with Babylonian and Canaanite magical religious practices and too little on the biblical data." (Rhodes, p. 22) In addition, Mowinckel's theory is out of harmony with the Hebrew psalmists' concept of the sovereignty of God. The Old Testament says nothing about an Israelite celebration of an annual enthronement of the Lord. Gunkel and other critics of Mowinckel's theory concluded that Mowinckel did not give proper weight to the Biblical teaching of the divine origin of Israel's religion. Instead, it appears that he assumed that the Hebrew religion evolved in much the same way that the Babylonian or Canaanite religions evolved.

Allan Petersen, in his critique of Mowinckel's position, describes the Babylonian practice in this way: "The basic acts of salvation and the covenant need to be renewed regularly in order that they do not lose their power. This is the reason for the regular cycle in which the covenant is renewed year after year. This is the cultic conceptual framework in which Mowinckel places the Old Testament psalms, including the so-called enthronement psalms." (Allan R. Petersen, "Enthronement Festivals in Ancient Israel and Ugarit?" in *The Royal God,* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd), 1998, p. 22.) Gunkel refuted Mowinckel's position and Petersen refers to that refutation in his own evaluation of Mowinckel's thesis.

Petersen calls attention to the following weaknesses in Mowinckel's general thesis. First, Mowinckel was far too enthusiastic in his selection of the psalms which he believed supported his thesis. The supposed annual "enthronement of the Lord" became a "magnet which attracted too many psalms." Second, the references to Israel festal New Year celebrations which are provided by Mowinckel are indefinite, opening the gates to errors in evaluation. Gunkel accepted the possibility of psalms devoted to the enthronement of the Lord but did not accept the vast number of psalms which Mowinckel placed in this category or their significance to the Israelites. Third, Mowinckel failed to see the enthronement of the earthly king as the true subject of the psalmists who wrote about a royal enthronement. Fourth, the character of the "enthronement psalms" could just as easily apply to other celebrations within the context of the Israelite religious observances making Mowinckel's reconstruction unnecessary when one takes into consideration the *Sitz em Leben* for a number of these psalms. Sixth, the enthronement of Marduk is based on the recitation of the Creation Epic, *Enuma Elish* but there is no mention there of an *annual* enthronement of Marduk. The only part which the *Enuma Elish* plays is that it was to be read each year but it does not support the idea of an annual celebration. Seventh, Petersen says that Mowinckel's method of interpretation presupposes that the New Year's celebration is the topic of the selected psalms. According to Petersen, Mowinckel therefore believed that he saw this celebration as the central theme of those psalms. This presents a problem because Mowinckel is using his conclusion to prove his point. That is, he is assuming his conclusion. Petersen therefore believes that Mowinckel's thesis is far too speculative. (Petersen, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-30.)

The Royal Psalms – The Anointing of the King

The subject of this group of psalms is the king. In many ways these psalms are like the Hymns, but they are generally placed in a separate category. Roland Murphy says, "These songs include 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132. The classification is based on content, not on literary characteristics. Actually they can be laments or thanksgiving [see below], but all are royal in that they commemorate some event that has its life setting in the king's experiences: accession (or the anniversary) to the throne (2, 72, 110); marriage (45); thanksgiving for victory in war (18, 21); pleas for the safety and victory of the king (20 and perhaps 144:1-11?)." (Roland Murphy, *The Jerome Bible Commentary: The Psalms*, Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy, editors. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 574.) In many of these psalms there is exaggeration in order to emphasize a characteristic. For example, the king is to rule forever, his empire is world-wide, peace and justice mark his reign, etc. We must therefore recognize the presence of poetic license in many of the psalms.

Some commentators, including Murphy refer to these as the Royal Psalms and some of them are frequently thought of as Messianic. The word "messiah" means "anointed one" and it did not apply exclusively to Christ. In almost every instance the original readers would have thought in terms of the Davidic kings since the Davidic dynasty was considered "anointed" by God. However, some of these psalms are cited in the New Testament as "Messianic" and are applied to Christ. The book of Hebrews gives a number of these applications. See Heb. 1:5, 6, 9, 13, Heb. 2:12, 5:6, etc. We must remember that this comes as an application, frequently giving the psalm a sort of double meaning. There is the original S*itz em Leben* which would have been obvious to the original readers in celebration of their king, and an ultimate application to the Messiah.

More passages from Psalms are quoted or alluded to in the New Testament than from any other Old Testament book. Frequently they are spoken of as having been "fulfilled." The original readers of psalms in this category would not get the idea that it was intended to predict anything about the Christian Age, Christ, Messiahship, etc. We therefore need to look closely at the difference between our concept of "fulfillment" and that of the New Testament writers.

"Fulfill" to us generally means that something was predicted and it came true or happened according to the prediction. In Hos. 11:1 the Lord is reminiscing about his love for Israel and the exodus event saying, "out of Egypt I called my son." Matthew speaks of this as "fulfilled" in the return of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus from their exile in Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod the Great. Matthew's use of the word "fulfill" was quite different from the idea of Old Testament "predictions" and the New Testament "fulfillments" the way we commonly use these terms.

Another example of different uses of Old Testament statements and New Testament "fulfillments" is seen in Matt. 13 where Jesus' uses a statement of Isaiah. Isaiah is rebuking the people of his own generation for their hardness of heart but Jesus quotes Isaiah's statement and applies it to his own audience after he had given the parable of the sower. See Matt. 13:11-15 and Is. 6:9-10. It is clear that seen in its original context Isaiah was not "predicting" Jesus' ministry. Many people misunderstand the use of Old Testament prophecies. Such passages in the Psalms and other parts of the Old Testament are used in an illustrative way by New Testament writers in

order to demonstrate a similar event in the New Testament. The New Testament writers frequently refer to this as "fulfillment."

Psalm 2 is a good example of the Royal Psalms. In the minds of the original hearers and readers of this psalm the poet is seen extolling the kingship of the linage of David and the grandeur of his dynasty. The linage of David was God's own choice for Israel. On the other hand, the writer of Hebrews views this as applying to the kingship of Christ and his superiority to all who went before him. This was a common tool of interpretation used by the New Testament writers as they referred to various Old Testament passages. Psalms 45:6-7 is applied to Christ when the writer of Hebrews refers to the superiority of Christ over the angels (Heb. 1:8-9). A number of the Royal Psalms and the Psalms of Zion have this type of double meanings as they are applied by the New Testament writers.

The Lord of Zion

Once again, Psalms in this category have much in common with the Hymns yet they have distinctive characteristics as they exalt the city of Jerusalem and Mt. Zion. Some celebrate the entrance of the king into the temple of God or into Zion, looking forward to the consummation of God's Kingdom. This however is somewhat veiled.

Psalms of Lament

These dealt with personal and community problems or complaints. The community may include the whole nation or a smaller group. These psalms generally begin with an appeal to "my God" for intervention in the life of the community or an individual. Although expressions of trust along with requests and pleas are also characteristic of this category, they are somewhat different from the Psalms of Trust.

The Psalms of Lament are not funeral dirges as in David's lament over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (II Sam. 1:18-27) or the destruction of Jerusalem as shown in Jeremiah's book of Lamentations. The Psalms of Lament instead are cries for deliverance from an enemy, a foe, from false accusations, sickness, injustices, or other distress. Frequently in this category we find expressions of thanksgiving and trust along with an affirmation of the Lord's protection. In the laments there are frequently strong exaggerations. See Ps. 22 and 69 as examples.

Laments of the Individual

As we would expect, this is the largest single category of the Psalms, and this is probably the strongest reason for the popularity of this classification. Here the reader finds the expression of his own feelings of need. These psalms are quite emotional and penetrating as the poets express the depth of their own grief, pain, sorrow, or other needs. There is frequently an expression of the psalmist's own feeling of personal innocence as he wonders why his enemies or adversaries are being allowed to treat him in such an unjust manner. The question is frequently implied, "Why am I, a righteous person having to suffer such depravation and abuse while less righteous (evil) people prosper?" See Ps. 73 as an example. This category also includes psalms of penitence and confession of sin along with seeking God's forgiveness. See Ps. 51 as an example.

Some of these psalms conclude with a strong affirmation of faith that God will act in justice and mercy. Gunkel, along with some other scholars, speaks of some of these psalms as "Spiritual Songs" emphasizing the personal nature of the Psalms of Individual Lament. The personal and private character of these songs restrains their appropriateness for community liturgical worship.

In most of these psalms we find the same general structure. First, there is the appeal for deliverance, followed by a description of the complaint. This is generally followed by either a confession of sin or an affirmation of innocence offered as the reason the Lord should intervene. Finally there is the promise of a sacrifice or other offering and a prayer of thanksgiving. The individual laments and the community laments may differ somewhat since the individual laments are usually more flexible than the community laments.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the Individual Laments is the certainty of the psalmist that he will be heard and the Lord will act on his complaint. This certainty reveals the psalmist's trust in the Lord and it comes as a sort of victorious cry or a statement of the psalmist's complete confidence in God. The Individual Laments are not statements of personal defeat but they come from a heart of faith and hope. The poet sees his despair as a real challenge but not void of hope.

Laments of the Community

These Laments are similar to the Individual Laments except that they are on a broad scale involving a whole gathering or the whole nation. The psalmist may picture people gathered at the temple, fasting and praying together and expressing the perils of their group or nation. When sorrows, troubles, or threats came to the nation or a smaller community, the psalmists would write these poetic prayers to God. He pours out the deepest feelings of his heart as he expresses these needs on behalf of the community. Together they are seeking God's deliverance. The complaints of the entire nation are frequently included in these psalms. In such instances scholars refer to them as psalms of national complaint or national lament. They generally begin with an appeal to "my God," or similar statements, for intervention in the life of the community. Passionate pleas and expressions of trust are characteristic of these psalms.

In the Community Laments, Israel's history of struggles has to be taken into account. If we overlook this we may see these as strong outcries, but not as prayers. The conception and birth of the nation of Israel centered in the cries of the people in Egyptian bondage. The entire exodus story tells of one great struggle after another, and their history in the Promised Land was consistently filled with difficult events. A great deal of their background was characterized by their fight for survival although many times it was their ungodly behavior which brought on these problems. If we look closely at the confessions of Jeremiah we get the feeling of the personal as well as the national struggles. In these circumstances we see the boldness of the poets as they confront God with their complaints as well as their sorrows.

Psalms of Thanksgiving

These are sometimes divided into individual and community expressions. In a sense these are in contrast to the Psalms of Individual and Community Lament. For example the psalmist may be thanking God for his deliverance (a psalm of thanksgiving) although in the previous verses he

may have been complaining about the unjust abuse he has suffered (as in a psalm of individual lament). Some of the psalms in this category involved the community and may have been used in public worship. On the other hand the individual expressions of thanksgiving were personal and probably were not used publicly. Some scholars believe that the Psalms of Thanksgiving may have accompanied certain sacrifices such as a thank offerings for the deliverance of the community or an individual from some peril. In some of these psalms there are references to the temple liturgy. See Ps. 66:13ff and 107:22-23.

Wisdom Psalms

This is a controversial category and scholars differ greatly concerning which psalms should be included here. Although Ps. 37 is frequently classified as a Wisdom Psalm it can also be thought of as a Psalm of Trust. Ps. 73 is somewhat similar because it brings up the question of the prosperity of the wicked and the trials of the righteous. Although the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are generally thought of as the Old Testament's primary books of wisdom, there is also much to be said for the wisdom found in the book of Psalms. Some of these psalms express the wisdom of the community in its relationship to God, some extol the wisdom of God in reward and retribution, and some extol the wisdom of the Law.

Psalms of Trust

Once again we come to a group of psalms which could fit into more than one category. This is seen clearly in the psalms in which the writer affirms his trust in the Lord. Although Psalm 31 is generally classified as an individual lament, verse 14 expresses a sort of theme for the entire psalm – "But I trust in you O Lord, for I have cried out to you." The same can be said of 22:10, 25:5, and others. The psalms of trust express the feelings of the community as the nation seeks God and expresses its confidence that God will respond to its needs. Some of these come from the community and others are from individuals. The enemies described are real not symbolic and the poor feel genuine oppression. They are miserable and distressed but their trust in the Lord is not shaken. Many of the other categories have a statement of trust but some other theme within the psalm is dominant.

Miscellaneous Psalms

This is a sort of "catch-all" category. Some psalms cover a variety of themes and have varied structure making them difficult to place any of the previous categories. A variety of literary types and expressions also occur in these psalms.

Affirmations of Faith

This is not a separate category but is descriptive of a theme which is common to a number of categories. In some of the psalms the poet expresses his dependence on God and we find unshakable trust in the Lord as we read the expression of the strength of his faith. In some ways this is akin to the Laments of the Individual and in other cases there is strong similarity to Psalms of Trust. In each of these there are frequent strong expressions of the psalmist's trust in the justice and mercy of God.

The Theology of the Psalms

Since the book of Psalms is a collection of the writings of various people in a variety of historical, spiritual, and cultural circumstances, it is impossible to present a systematic theology of the Psalms. The Psalms present us with a picture of God in multiple ways. The pictures are not consistent. We see God but we also see the psalmist's concept of God with interesting variations. Within the collections of psalms common elements can be seen, some of which are the writers' concepts of God, sin, forgiveness, divine intervention, prayer, and other theological issues which come to life in the various collections. These will be briefly discussed under fifteen headings. The Psalms as Poetic Expressions of Theology, The Picture of God in the Psalms, God is Active, The God Who Creates, The God Who Saves, The God Who Rules, The God Who Judges, The God Who Has Elected Israel, The God Who Reveals Himself to Israel, The Character and Nature of God, God is Holy, God is Righteous, God is Loving and Faithful, God is a Spirit, and God is One.

The Psalms as Poetic Expressions of Theology. Israel's songs were not simply expressions of feelings and emotions, but they consistently display a theological perspective. The theocratic dimension of the nation contributed to this motif since God is depicted as participating in Israel's history. He was winning their battles, providing their prosperity, giving them comfort, protecting their boundaries, and assuring their security. He rejoiced with them and he shared their sorrow. He felt their pain and he felt their relief. In the book of Psalms and the other poems strewn through Israel's history we see the irritations and frustrations of the nation and individuals as they express their consternation at God for not acting as they thought he should. In Israel's psalms we see the chosen people confessing their dependence on God and expressing their gratitude for his intervention. He is always involved with his people. This is the view of the psalmists throughout Israel's history.

It is important to remember that the Psalms are uniquely attached to Hebrew worship, and worship is perceived as man's response to God and his actions. As is characteristic of poetry in general, so in the Psalms we find symbolic expressions, some of which exaggerate feelings of anger, feeling of abandonment, of persecutions, and of inadequacy. The theology of the Psalms is not systematized, but its components are clearly visible as we engage them individually.

The Picture of God in the Psalms. What is God like in the Psalms? He is seen as one who intervenes directly in the national and personal affairs of his people. He is the God of peace, the God who leads his people in war, the God of the covenant, the God of steadfast love and fidelity. He is the God of deliverance, the God of righteousness, and the God of divine justice. In the psalms the poets express their exaltation of God but they also blame him for not acting when they believe they need him to act or in the way they want him to act. In the Psalms we find the writers blaming God, questioning God, thanking God, and seeing God as non-responsive. God is also seen as loving, ever-present, forgiving, guiding, providing security, protecting, comforting, and encouraging. He is the God who is at once both imminent and transcendent – the God who is approachable yet he is also the sovereign Lord who is ruler of the universe and heaven. He is clothed in light. As creator and sustainer of all things, he is the God of all power and wisdom and he is ever present everywhere. No one psalmist covers each of these but these and other attributes and works of God are constantly seen in the Psalms. See Ps. 104 and Ps. 139 both of

which describe so much of the transcendence of God in beautiful poetic imagery. Arnold Rhodes characterizes some of these attributes as the activity, the nature, and the character of God. (Rhodes, pp. 14-18.)

God is Active. The Lord is not static. He did not create the world and then sit quietly by to see what mankind would do with that creation. He is not watching the development of human events as a spectator watches a stage play or a sporting event. Instead he is a dynamic power at work in the history of mankind. In the Psalms we get a glimpse of this dynamic God who acts on the stage of human history, bringing about his will and intervening in the affairs of men. Some of his activities are seen in the fact that he creates, he saves, he rules, he judges, he has elected Israel, and he reveals himself to his people.

The God Who Creates. It is God who has brought everything into existence and he acts in the history of his creation. The psalmists neither try to defend God as Creator nor describe the mechanism of creation. Instead they affirm and extol God as sovereign and all powerful.

The God Who Saves. Salvation is not described in terms of eternity but of deliverance from evil, sin, or death. This deliverance is seen as a moving force going from the negatives in life to the positives – from famine to food, from feelings of abandonment to the security of love, from spiritual and material deprivation to spiritual and material blessings. Therefore this salvation may take place in the midst of suffering without the thought of being relieved from the suffering but only the thought of God's security and love even in the presence of one's own pain.

When comparing the Old Testament use of the word "salvation" to the use of the same word in the New Testament, the Old Testament concept is somewhat unique. From Genesis through Esther the word occurs only fifteen times. In the Psalms it occurs sixty-five times. It is found once in Job and it occurs fifty-two times in all seventeen prophets combined. Twenty-eight of the occurrences in the prophets are found in Isaiah and all of these are in poetic sections of the book. The word is a favorite among the writers of poetic portions of the Old Testament.

As we read the New Testament we relate salvation to our eternal destiny. The ancient Hebrews seldom used it in that way. Instead it is the action of God on Israel's behalf. At times it is also seen as God's action in behalf of the individual. There are many and varied uses of this word. For example, see Ps. 9:13-14 where the psalmist is speaking of how the Lord had delivered the writer (and probably the nation) from his enemies. In Ps. 14:6-7 he speaks of the salvation which God had brought about in the return of the people from captivity. See also 118:14-15 where the word occurs twice. In that passage in the NIV one time the word is translated "salvation" and the second time it is translated "victory."

Along with this, some of the Psalms express the author's desire that God would take vengeance on the writer's enemies and show no mercy to them. In Ps. 137 we have a description of the bitterness of the Babylonian Exile. This vengeance of God against the Babylonians has the force of "salvation" in that God has acted in Israel's behalf to release them from exile and to punish their captors. The psalm ends with this statement:

O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction,
happy is he who repays you
for what you have done to us —
he who seizes your infants
and dashes them against the rocks.

This is difficult for a Christian to harmonize with Christ's injunction that we are to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43-44) or Paul's prohibition against Christians taking vengeance on their enemies (Rom. 12:17-21). However, we must remember that the Psalms are made up of many situations in which men are expressing to God the deepest feelings of their hearts. Many times these feelings involve anger, retaliation, or other malevolent attitudes. There is probably no human emotion – noble or ignoble – which is not expressed in the Psalms.

The God Who Rules. He is the sovereign monarch of all creation. The psalmists speak of this sovereignty in the past, in the present, and in the future. The Psalms appear to have some veiled anticipations of the coming of the Kingdom of God as developed in the New Testament. A problem with this however is that one's concept of the nature of the Kingdom plays an important role in one's interpretation of such passages. The New Testament concept of the Kingdom of God would probably not have been in the mind of either the author or the original readers. However, some commentators consider some of these statements as specific prophetic predictions of a coming Messiah. These commentators go to passages like Ps. 89 and 132 in defense of this position. However, from the vantage point of the original readers these would probably not have been considered Messianic or eschatological. As we read and interpret the Psalms, it is important that we place ourselves in the Hebrew context of Old Testament history and ask ourselves what the original readers would have seen and understood in the various psalms they read.

The God Who Judges. This is really a part of the function of God as the reigning monarch and ultimate sovereign. He is a God of justice as well as mercy. Evil will be punished and righteousness will be rewarded. The psalmists see the reward as deliverance. Along with God's righteous judgment and the condemnation of evil there is also the description of his mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

The God Who Has Elected Israel. Israel as a whole misunderstood its election even though their election was part of the promise made to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3. The people had every reason to rejoice in the honor of this election and some of the psalmists praise God for his covenant with his people. Israel however perceived of itself as God's chosen nation upon whom God would shower his blessings and this was contrasted with the Gentiles who were not the chosen people of God. The psalmists extolled God for his benevolence toward his people but Israel's perception of this "status" gradually became a matter of pride. They saw their election as a special privileged class of people compared to others (Gentiles) who were not chosen, and therefore did not enjoy the same status.

The God Who Reveals Himself to Israel. God's words and deeds combine to bring to fruition his self-revelation to Israel. His acts reveal much about him but he goes further and reveals himself in his laws, through nature, through worship, through the covenants, and through his revela-

tions to the prophets. Over and over he revealed himself in the history of the nation – the deliverance from Egyptian bondage, his intervention during the conquest of Canaan and the period of the judges. His guidance of David and other Davidic kings attest to his constant revelation of himself to the nation.

The Character and Nature of God. In addition to the aforementioned characteristics of the Psalms, they also tell us about the nature and character of God. In the Psalms, more than in any other part of the Bible, we have a description of God as holy, righteous, loving, and faithful. There is but one God, and he is Spirit.

God is Holy. The basic meaning of the word holy is "to be separate." When applied to God this says that he is in a category by himself. Incorporated in this word is also the quality of goodness. God also separates certain things, events, and people for himself, making them holy. In the New Testament the word "holy" is a translation of the Greek word αγιος (*hagios*) meaning "holy, devoted, hallowed or separate." Rhodes expresses this by saying, "It means that God is far above us but not far from us." (Rhodes, *op. cit.* p.19.) In the Psalms God is exalted as a God of holiness; the sacrifices made to God are holy; the throne of God is holy; and he requires that his chosen nation shall be people of holiness.

God is Righteous. God is pictured as just, merciful, and good. His chosen people are likewise to be just, merciful, and good. In the Psalms we see righteousness as a description of God's nature.

God is Loving and Faithful. This is expressed in a variety of ways. Israel is God's inheritance, the nation is his children, they are his sheep, and they are his elect. In some English translations (RSV) this is described as "his steadfast love" or (NIV) "his enduring [or] unfailing love." See Ps. 77:8 and 107. His fidelity is always present – his words and deeds are authentic and dependable. His love and fidelity are also associated with his mercy and grace. These characteristics are frequently placed in the context of the sanctity of God's covenant with his people.

God is a Spirit. In an anthropomorphic way God is said to have eyes, ears, hands, and arms but his essence is Spirit. As a Spirit his power is seen, his omnipresence is emphasized, and his wisdom is exalted. See Ps. 139:1-12.

God is One. The Psalms emphasize monotheism and most of the psalmists do not consider the issue of other gods. The Lord is their only concern. For examples, see Ps. 40:4, 77:13, 81:1, and 95:3, and 96:4-5. There is no other divine being considered a rival of the Lord. When other gods are mentioned, they are shown to be powerless and false. Israel did not consider God in any kind of Trinitarian way. This doctrine is confined to the New Testament.

Interpretation of the Psalms

Interpretation of the psalms presents a very unique problem. The information already provided shows us that normal exegetical methods and practices do not work well when dealing with poetic material. Dorothea Harvey wrote, "One of the first things a reader needs to determine is

whether he is reading poetry or prose. To take a poetic figure literally, or for that matter to take a literal statement figuratively, is to fail to grasp the original intent." (Dorothea W. Harvey. "The Literary Forms of the Old Testament," in *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible,* Charles M. Laymon, editor, (New York: Abingdon Press), 1971, p. 1077.)

As we have previously stated, we know that the psalms were written over a very long period of time, by different authors in different personal and national circumstances, and in a wide variety of historical and religious settings. As we go from one psalm to another we find no continuity of thought. In any miscellaneous collection of poems this is what we would expect. Different scholars categorize the psalms in different ways. Some of this is a difference in nomenclature rather than a difference in substance. As one reads the Book of Psalms he sees that they were primarily written out of the experiences of life, and they reflect the various emotions, feelings, problems, and praises which characterize the life of the average person. This, in part, makes them the most frequently read portion of the Old Testament but it also presents some difficulties in properly interpreting the Psalms. The reader must attempt to get inside of the mind and thinking of the poet in order to clearly understand his message. To some degree this is a characteristic problem in interpreting any great poem.

A distraction in the study of Psalms is the sense of distance between our own world and culture and the world and culture of the psalmists. Not only are we far removed from their world but we are not sure just what historical period from which many of the psalms came. The time of the judges was quite different from the Divided Kingdom period just as the exilic period was far different from the Davidic period.

In all poetry the use of descriptive terms such as beautiful, good, think, modest, or thank have different connotations in different languages. When translating poetic figures and symbols this can create a problem. There may not be a word equivalent in another language which adequately represents the meaning of the symbolic words used by the poet. To his immediate audience the mental image created by these symbolic words might be one of beauty but it might not produce a concept of beauty in the minds of a foreign audience. The Hebrew language frequently carries word pictures which are not readily translatable into other languages. This is especially evident in its poetry. Therefore, some of its original beauty, and consequently some of its original message, may be lost in translation, or at least not fully expressed. This fact emphasizes the importance of studying the historical, cultural, political, and religious backgrounds of Biblical texts.

Claus Westermann observes that praise of God played a primary role in Israel's worship but it has lost much of its emphasis in Christian churches. Praise is an elusive idea. When one person says to another, "I praise you," this can be very indirect and perhaps without feeling or meaning. On the other hand, when one individual says to another, "You did that very well" there is a greater likelihood that a sense of feeling and authenticity is in the statement because the subject has changed from "I" to "You." Westermann believes that this is significant in the Psalms of Thanksgiving, which played an important role in Israel's worship. In the thanksgiving psalms the psalmist's primary topic is praise and the exaltation of God. Instead of saying, "I thank and I praise God," the Israelite would phrase it more like "God be praised for his goodness and his mercy to Israel." "God" is the subject rather than "I" being the subject. This is not intended to detract from the statement, "I praise you," which also may be very sincere and authentic. These

expressions can take on many different modes and forms. The psalms demonstrate this idea. The principle and perhaps our own understanding of this will give us greater insight into the thinking and mindset of the Israelite poet. (Claus Westermann, *The Praise of God in Psalms*, second edition, (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press), 1965, p. 29.)

R.B.Y. Scott refers to the book of Psalms as the "service book of the Jewish church" or the "hymnbook of the Second Temple." This would make it prominent during the first Christian century. Furthermore, the insights concerning the nature of God which we gain in reading and studying the Psalms presents a unique picture. The New Testament does not provide the wealth of information about God and his interaction with his people as we find in the graphic descriptions in the Psalms. The true unvarnished interactions and responses of man to God are vividly portrayed in the Psalms as in no other part of Scripture. (Scott, R.B.Y. *The Psalms as Christian Praise*, (New York: Association Press), 1958, pp.10-11, 21-23.) The books of Chronicles tell us of the appointment of musicians, choruses, and choirs particularly during the time of David.

We know that the Psalms played an important role in Israel's worship in the postexilic world and during the time of Christ. In a contemporary Jewish synagogue the Psalms are still prominent. Patrick Miller contends that the rhythmic pulse and cadence of the Hebrew language appears to play a hermeneutical role as well as a musical role. "The form of the psalms is not separate from their content." Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973).

Christians and Jews alike have used the Psalms in a wide variety of ways. Psalms have found a welcome place in church liturgy, in a devotional context, pastorally, and homiletically. These uses of the psalms are important to the individual and to the church or the Jewish community. This is particularly evident in the personal devotional use of the Psalms. We cannot overlook the fact that the Bible of the first century church was the Old Testament. The New Testament was in the process of being written. In Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 Paul speaks of singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The original recipients of these two epistles would certainly have thought of the book of Psalms. There can be no doubt that there was a strong emphasis and continual usage of the Old Testament psalms among the first century Christians and later. It is evident then that many of the Psalms played an important role in the worship and the life of the early church. In Christianity today Old Testament psalms are frequently the basis of our hymns.

Most of the psalms can be tied to their own original environment and to our contemporary environment as well without doing violence to their content. In much the same way ancient Christian hymns transcend time and find their messages as meaningful to contemporary man as to the original recipients. Their messages continue to resonate with contemporary readers.

The first verse of Ps. 130 exemplifies this as it speaks to all people in every generation of history. "Out of the depths, I cry to you O Lord." Miller gives an interesting summary of some of these situations which are common to all mankind regardless of time or place. He lists ten of these with examples of each.

1. The frailty of human life. Ps. 103:15, and Ps. 90: 10
2. The declaration of the glory of God. Ps. 8 and 19.

3. The experience of feeling God-forsaken. Ps. 9, 13:1, 122:1-2, 83:1.
4. The trustworthiness of God. Ps. 23.
5. The joy and blessing of children. Ps. 127, 128.
6. The overwhelming sense of sin and guilt. Ps. 51.
7. The experience of reaching for the transcendent God. Ps. 42, 139.
8. The feeling of anxiety, despair, and anguish. Ps. 10:9, 22:12, 31:13.
9. The feeling of being released into a broad place and being set free. Ps. 4:1, 18:19, 31:8.
10. The experience of feeling worthless – low self-esteem. Ps. 22.

When reading the Psalms, we must consider the mind of the poet as he expresses his own feelings and needs. We must remember that the theology of the Psalms is not manufactured by the poet, but it is the merging of human experiences and divine inspiration.

Chapter II
The Hymns

Psalm 8

Introduction and Summary

There are nineteen psalms which have been categorized as "Hymns." The first psalm which fits into this category is Psalm 8. Arnold B. Rhodes entitles this psalm "Genesis 1 Set to Music." (Rhodes *Layman's Commentary*, p. 35.) A portion of this psalm is cited in Heb. 2:6-8. The writer of Hebrews does not identify the author of the psalm but simply says, "someone has testified." However, the psalm's superscription states that it is "For the music director. According to *gittith.* A psalm of David." Emil G. Hirsch says that the word "gittith" is thought to refer to a musical instrument somewhat like a zither or a small harp but its meaning is not known for sure. (http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6693-gittith.)

The writer of Hebrews does not use the psalm in its context and he does not apply it as it was originally intended or even as it was written. Instead, he adapts it to his argument in a demonstrative or semi-allegorical way rather than using it in an exegetical manner. It was not unusual for the writer of Hebrews to use some Old Testament statements in this way. This practice was employed by some of the first century rabbis and would have been familiar to the recipients of the book of Hebrews. Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C. – A.D.50) was probably the best known Jewish scholar of his day, and he is known to have allegorized some Old Testament passages.

The introduction to the psalm is an exclamation of the majesty of the name of the Lord; "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth." An introductory statement of this sort is characteristic of the Hymns of Praise. This statement is a direct address to and about God. The psalmist extols the power, majesty, and sovereignty of the Lord, and he is going to contrast man's limitations with the glory of the omnipotent God. However, the poet is overwhelmed that the Lord would have exalted man to the high position, "a little lower than God." The Hebrew word "Elohim," which occurs in this phrase, can be translated either "God" or "heavenly beings. Consequently, some commentators believe that "heavenly beings" is to be preferred here. Others, including Rhodes believe that "God" is the better translation since the purpose of the psalmist is to contrast the greatness of God with the seeming insignificance of man. The psalmist emphasizes the fact that the Lord has honored mankind immeasurably. The psalm concludes as it began: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth."

Commentary

Verse 1 is highly descriptive of God's power and majesty. For the psalmist the majesty of God is seen in his name as well as in his creation. "How majestic is your *name*" is more than just a statement of God's reputation. To the Hebrew mind and in the minds of many pagans as well, the name of God (of their gods in cases of the pagans) was very important. The word translated

"Lord," the personal name of God, shows the psalmist's reverence for the name. In Matt. 21:16, Jesus quoted a portion of Ps. 8:2 at the time of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Verse 2 shows how the psalmist sees all of God's creation proclaiming the Lord's majesty. The most helpless among us, sucklings (infants) and children, sound the glory of God. The Lord did not need a spectacular part of his creation to make the statement of his glory. Instead that testimony comes effectively and with great power from the most helpless within our ranks. The power of the Lord is proclaimed regardless of whomever or whatever might oppose him. The mighty foes of opposition are defeated not by force, power, or strength but by the very existence of the least powerful of God's creation, the infants.

In verses 3-4 the psalmist sees that God's creation is magnificent and massive yet intricate and ordered. The poet is therefore compelled to ask, "What is man that you are mindful of him?" Here he uses synonymous parallelism by adding "or the son of man that you care for him?" The expression "son of man" is not meant to be a title, but it is a common Hebrew expression designed to emphasize the writer's point. It is found frequently in Ezekiel.

Verse 5 tells us that God crowned man with glory and honor. The idea of man's position is introduced by the psalmist with the question, "What is man that you are mindful of him?" James Mays makes an interesting comment concerning the uniqueness of the presentation of mankind and the theology of God's sovereignty. "What is distinctive in Psalm 8 is the way this theology is used to define humankind. The 'son of man' . . . has been vested with a rank just below that of God . . . has been endowed with the royal traits of glory and honor, and has been given dominion over all living things." (Mays, *op. cit.*, p. 66.)

As mentioned above, the Hebrew phrase in verse 5 uses the word "Elohim" which is translated "God" in most English versions except the NIV ("heavenly beings) and the KJV (angels). The LXX has the Greek word αγγελους (*aggelous*) here and the writer of Hebrews uses the LXX in his quotation. It is possible that translators of the KJV and NIV were influenced by the Greek text of Heb. 2:7 as well as the LXX. Lawrence E. Toombs comments on this with these words: "In the phrase **little less than God** (Ps. 8:5) the Hebrew word *elohim* may be translated 'judges,' 'heavenly beings,' 'gods,' or 'God.' The LXX took it to mean 'angels' but since it is a normal Old Testament word for 'God' this seems the best translation here." (Toombs, *op. cit.*, p. 264).

Verses 6-8 tell us that God made man the ruler of his creation, *i.e.* the works of God's hands. In a sense, this question, "What is man?" leads to the grand contrast of the psalm. It defines man as God's ultimate creation which accords well with the statement in Gen. 1:26-28 that man was created in the image of God. Mankind was given broad liberty and responsibility over many of the elements of God's world. When Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden he was given the job "to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15). This task was not a result of Adam's sin as some people believe. This responsibility was given prior to the entrance of sin into the world. Some have overlooked this and have therefore misinterpreted Gen. 3:17-19.

God crowned mankind with glory and honor, and *gave* him dominion of the creation. This dominion was not earned by man and it was not a license for man to do as he pleased. Instead, it

was a gift which God bestowed on man. Also involved in this is the fact that mankind has some responsibility for the course of civilization. Not only was he given dominion over the animals but he was made "a little lower than God" and was "crowned with glory and honor." This places a great moral-ethical responsibility of stewardship on mankind toward God's earth, "to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15). In other psalms the idea is frequently expressed that God is the owner and ruler of the earth. "I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine." (Ps. 50:9-11)

Verse 9 completes the purpose of the psalm, *i.e.* to extol the greatness of God and the lowliness of mankind not by humiliating mankind but by looking at his ultimate powerlessness compared to the omnipotence of the Almighty. Yet, an all important component of the psalm is to see the position and honor accorded to mankind by the Creator. We must remember that God, not man is the sovereign ruler and owner of all creation but man has been given the responsibility and stewardship of its care. To the psalmist, this was an overwhelming thought. He therefore concludes this hymn of praise with the same words he used in its beginning. "O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth."

Psalms 19

Introduction and Summary

Psalm 19 is usually divided into two distinct parts (19:1-6 and 19:7-14). It has a great deal in common with Ps. 8 in that it extols the grandeur of God's creation but there are significant differences. In Ps. 8 man is prominent since he was created a little lower than God. In Ps. 19 man is secondary as the psalmist extols the greatness of God's creation and God's Law. Both of these psalms have all of the characteristics of Hymns of Praise but the second part of Ps. 19 has strong characteristics of a Psalm of Wisdom. This type of mixed subject matter is found in many of the psalms and has caused scholars to classify some of them in different ways.

The mixture of the subject matter along with other considerations has caused some scholars to conclude that there is a problem of unity in Ps. 19. Various scholars have called attention to the fact that the word "God" is used in 19:1-6 but the word "Lord" is used in 19:7-14. The general style of the two sections is also different. Rhodes believes that these two sections were originally two separate psalms, one which revealed God in the physical universe, and the other which revealed him in the Law. Rhodes says, "The differences in point of view, subject matter, poetic meter, and the names of God point to this conclusion." (Rhodes, *op. cit.* p. 46.) However, Peter Craigie says that the word "God" may be used initially to introduce the power of the Creator when one observes his creation. The word "Lord," the name of God, is used in the second section to show the personal identification of the Creator in giving Israel the Torah. (Craigie, *op. cit.*, on CD). In the mind of the Israelites this difference could have emphasized Israel's personal relationship with the God of creation.

Another argument made in support of the lack of unity between the two sections is that the first section has long lines but the second section is made up of shorter lines. However it is easy to see that the psalmist may be using the first section to express a feeling of awe at the grandeur of the creation, and in the second section he acknowledges the same conclusion about the grandeur of the Law. In this view, the second section builds on the objective observance in the first section. If this was in the mind of the poet, the problem of the unity of the psalm is not relevant. The style of the second section has similarities to the style of Ps. 119.

Although the psalm is generally divided into just two sections, verses 11-13 may be considered a third section. The psalmist moves from the grandeur of the universe (19:1-6) to the grandeur of the Torah (19:7-10) to grandeur of the Torah's practical application in the life of the devotee (19:11-13). In verses 11-13 we see the psalmist's confession of his need for divine strength and forgiveness. Verse 14 is his prayer that his heart and speech will be acceptable to the Lord. In this psalm we have a journey beginning with the power of the Creator and concluding with the needs of his creatures.

Commentary

Verses 1-6 praise the grandeur of the creation making similar observations as Ps. 8:3. In verse 1 the psalmist speaks of the declaration of the heavens – "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handy work." Compare the Lord's response to Job in Job 38-41 and Paul's brief observation in Rom. 1:20. The 19th Psalm affirms the existence of God through the testimony of the universe. The existence of such an intricately designed universe testifies to the fact of willful design and an all powerful Designer. The word "firmament," used in many English translations, simply means the "heavens" as commonly viewed. The NIV translates this as "skies." In the opening affirmation we see the poet's use of synonymous parallelism.

Verses 2-4a speak of the heavens singing an anthem of unheard sounds. All day, every day, and all night, every night the endless declaration of the universe is heard through its silent voice. As science continues to explore the mysteries of the universe – its origin, design, expansion, and destiny – the message of a divine and all powerful Creator continue to be heard, not by the physical ear, but by the perceptive ears of all human beings. Once again, in beautiful synonymous parallelism the psalmist says "Their voice goes out into all the earth and their words to the end of the world." Unfortunately some people continue to ignore that inaudible voice though it speaks with immeasurable volume. The expanse of the universe is beyond man's imagination.

Verses 4b-6 speak of the sun. The "solar disk," as the Egyptians perceived it, has been a fascination to all men of all time. Pagan religions have deified it in a variety of ways, some with hymns and poems, and others with narrative mythological stories about its origin. Such songs and poems of the Babylonians, Egyptians, and other Middle Eastern countries were no doubt well known to our psalmist but his theology is in no way akin to theirs. The writer of the 19th psalm is not deifying the sun or making it an object to be worshipped. Even the sun is under the sovereignty of God. Instead this poet sees the sun as an integral part of God's design in the heavens. Each day the sun performs God's plan, symbolically described as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber and as a strong man running his race. The sun's warmth is felt and enjoyed by all of God's creation.

Verses 7-11 build on verses 1-6. The same Creator who set the planets into their orbits and fixed the stars in their places gave a priceless gift to his people Israel. It was called the Torah or Law. Contrary to the opinions of many people in our own day and in ages past, the godly Hebrew people loved the Law. Though it was a burden, as is the case with almost all laws, there was nothing in the world comparable to the ethical, moral, and religious protection and guidance given by the Law. The entire 119th psalm extols the Law's virtues and its blessings to Israel. The forceful terms of Ps. 19:7-10 enumerate a few of these gifts. The Law is from God. It accomplishes what human laws can never accomplish.

The poet's use of a variety of terms in this section is not an effort to divide the Law into types of regulations – laws, statutes, precepts, commands, and ordinances – but his skillful use of poetic language to express the breadth and latitude of the Law. The benefits of the Law are seen in each of these practical applications in the life of the poet. Through this exaltation of the Law he intends to bring his readers (hearers) to a greater appreciation of God's Law. It was not given

simply to restrict the devotee but to bring the highest degree of happiness, security, and peace to him.

He lists some of the reasons for loving the Law of God:

The Law of the Lord is perfect
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy
The precepts of the Lord are right
The commands of the Lord are radiant
The fear of the Lord is pure
The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous

It revives the soul
They make wise the simple
They give joy to the heart
They give light to the eyes
It endures forever
They are more precious than gold, sweeter then honey, and in keeping them there is great reward

Let's look at these individually.

"It revives the soul." To those who are weary, the Law was a refresher. It brought a reminder of Israel's intimate relationship to the Creator of all. It is the inner food needed by all men, knowing that the guidance of the Almighty was inseparable from inward security.

"It makes wise the simple." Where else could an Israelite go to tap into the great reservoir of God's wisdom?

"It gives joy to the heart." The psalmist shows that there is an inward blessing of joy which comes to those who hold God's precepts in highest honor and allows those precepts to be his guide.

"It gives light to the eyes." Blindness has always been thought of as great tragedy. Blindness of heart is even worse. The psalmist tells us that God's commands overcome that blindness and provide illumination to the eyes.

"It endures forever." The Law is replete in teaching reverence for God. We should not shy away from the word "fear." The Bible uses it in a way which says that there needs to be a healthy fear when one lives in disobedience and disrespect for God.

God's laws are "more precious than gold" and "sweeter than honey." Furthermore, "in keeping them there is great reward." The reason for this is that all of God's laws are completely righteous. The Lord does not command us out of a capricious motive but out of his love for us and his desire for our wellbeing. All of his laws are for our good. This concluding statement is appropriate because it draws all the others together.

Verses 12-13 are usually included in the second section of the psalm. Although there is a dynamic connection there is also reason to set these verses apart as a conclusion. It is here that the psalmist gives his personal observations and applications of all of the preceding information. The Law causes him to inspect his own motives – "Who can discern his errors?" This is a difficult task but constant attention and devotion to the Law helps one to see himself as God sees him. As he sees his own sins and weaknesses through meditation on the Law he finds that he has hidden faults in his own conduct. Some of these might be "willful sins" and he sees his own need for God to guide him away from these presumptuous acts. He has already said that the sun sheds its light and heat on the earth. In a similar manner the Law provides spiritual light and warmth to the adherent. Since the Law gives divine guidance, in keeping it a person will be innocent of great transgression.

In verse 14, the final verse of the psalm, the poet turns to himself expressing his prayer to be devoted to the God of such creative power, who is also the Lord whose gracious character blessed Israel with the Torah.

Psalm 103

Introduction and Summary

Steward McCullough introduces this psalm by saying, "This psalm, as the place it has won in the devotional life of the church testifies, is one of the noblest hymns in the Old Testament. It appears to have had its genesis in an individual's deep sense of gratitude to God for sins forgiven and for the recovery from a desperate illness." (Stewart McCullough, *The Interpreter's Bible: Vol. IV, The Book of Psalms,* (New York: Abingdon Press), 1955, p 544.) Characteristically this Hymn of Praise lists various reasons why the Lord is to be praised. These include such things as God's power of creation, his help for the poor, his care for the sick, his compassion to all men, his love and gracious forgiveness, his involvement in Israel's history, and the like.

This psalm abounds in synonymous parallelism and simile. The writer first engages in self-exhortation as he opens the poem. "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name." Throughout the psalm he illustrates the depth and extent of the love, compassion, grace, and righteousness of the Lord. He does this by referring to the east and the west, the heavens and earth, the love of a father for his children, and man's frailty as the grass and the flower of the field. This psalm is a demonstration of the very deep religious feelings of the psalmist. The word "bless" is used in some English translations rather than "praise." The Hebrew word means "to bless, kneel, praise, or salute."

In this psalm the Lord is praised for his character and a wide variety of his acts. In its twenty-two verses the poet lists twenty-one reasons for praising the Lord. Roland Murphy along with many other commentators calls attention to the fact that the twenty-two lines of the poem correspond to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet although they do not form an acrostic structure. Many commentators believe that there is an effort on the part of the psalmist to be comprehensive in his presentation of praise. (Murphy, *op. cit.* p. 140.)

The twenty-one reasons for praising the Lord are:

Vs. 2 He gives you benefits
Vs. 3 He forgives of all your sin
He heals your diseases
Vs. 4 He redeems your life from the grave
He crowns you with love and compassion
Vs. 5 He satisfies your desires with good things
Vs. 6 He works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed
Vs. 7 He made his ways known to Moses and his deeds to Israel
Vs. 8 He is compassionate and gracious
He is slow to anger
He abounds in love
Vs. 9 He will not always accuse
Vs. 9 He will not harbor his anger forever

Vs. 10 He does not treat you as your sins deserve
Vs. 10 He does not repay you according to your iniquities
Vs. 11 His love is as high as the heavens
Vs. 12 He removes your transgressions as far as the east is from the west
Vs. 13 He is a compassionate Father to those who fear him
Vs. 14 He knows how we are formed
Vs. 17 His love is from everlasting to everlasting to those who fear him
Vs. 18 His righteousness is with your children's children for those who keep his covenant and obey his precepts

We immediately notice that the Lord is to be praised for his circumspect attention to all of the needs of mankind. Nothing goes unnoticed.

The divisions of this psalm are not as pronounced as those in Ps. 8 or Ps. 19, but they can be identified. The first section, verses 1-5, describes the psalmist's own self-exhortation to offer praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. He is particularly grateful for the Lord's forgiveness, expressing this in reference to his own redemption and healing. It may be that the poet has linked his diseases to his sins either objectively or subjectively. In the second section, verses 6-18, there are praises which come from the community. This is indicated by the use of such expressions as "all," "peoples of Israel," "us and our sins," "those who fear him," "we are formed," and "their children's children." On the other hand, these verses may be taken as the psalmist's exhortation for the community to join in these praises. In this section he goes back to the time of the exodus event to remind the nation of God's intervention in their history. The third section, verses 19-22 expresses praises from the entire creation in heaven and on earth. The sovereignty of God is emphasized as the psalmist says that the Lord is the ruler over all things, even the heavenly beings.

Commentary

The psalm opens with the words, "Praise the Lord O my soul; all my innermost being praise his holy name." Hebrew scholars generally consider the word "soul" to be a poor substitute for the original word. To many people "soul" is a rather vague word and it is thought of as the equivalent of "spirit." In the LXX, the word here translated "soul" is ψυχη (*psuchē*) which means "life, self, individual or personality." It encompasses the individual's whole being, and is therefore a rather broad word. In the synonymous parallelism of the second phrase of verse 2, "all my innermost being" expresses more closely the original meaning of "soul." It is not the same as the Greek word πνευμα (*pneuma*) which means "spirit or breath." For comments on the meaning of the Lord's name see Ps. 8.

Verse 2 gives a concrete reason for the psalmist's desire to praise the Lord. The Lord has forgiven him of all his sins and he is therefore determined not to forget that great benefit bestowed by God. This is a basic theological doctrine of the psalm, and it is the author's greatest concern. He appears to attribute the healing of his diseases to the reality of God's forgiveness. This emphasis on forgiveness introduces the topic of God's grace which is not fully developed in the Old Testament but comes to life in the New Testament, particularly in the writings of Paul. Grace is

inseparably tied to the doctrine of forgiveness and the merging of these concepts form the dominant reason for the poet's self-exhortation to praise the Lord.

In connection with this, verses 3-5 speak of the Lord who "redeems your life from the pit." The word translated "pit" is frequently translated "sheol" in English version. It is a non-descript statement referring to death or the place of the dead. God's forgiveness overcomes the power of death. Instead of the dark gloom of death, the Lord "crowns you with love and compassion" and "satisfies your desire with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle" (verse 5). Among ancient people as well as in our own time, the eagle is a symbol of strength and endurance. The eagle and some other birds go through an annual molting of their feathers. The old feathers drop off and are left behind and the new feathers grow in their place. Thus the eagle has a symbolic return to its youth. In forgiveness the psalmist saw his relationship with the Lord renewed in a similar way.

In the next section, verses 6-18, the psalmist speaks of God's steadfast love and compassion for those who fear him (verses 11, 13, and 17). Having laid out this foundation which is demonstrated by his own life experience, in verse 6 he begins bidding the community to join in the praise of God because each of God's children has experienced the same sins and all have received the same benefits of forgiveness. The first order of things is to begin remembering how the Lord's righteousness and justice have relieved the oppressed. In verse 7 the psalmist mentions God's revelation to Moses and the people at the time Israel was redeemed out of Egyptian bondage.

As part of this block, verses 7-10 recall a time when Israel sinned against the Lord but they also experienced his divine forgiveness. In verse 8, the expression "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love" was not simply a slogan to be thoughtlessly repeated by the people. For the psalmist it was the expression of his own deepest thoughts of gratitude for God's forgiveness. After the events surrounding Israel's worship of the golden calf and the punishment which followed Moses once again ascended the mountain. In Ex. 34:6-7, the Lord met him and passed in front of him proclaiming:

> "'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.'" Ex. 34:6-7

Verse 8 says, "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love." The phrases are similar to those spoken to Moses by the Lord in Ex. 34:5-7. (Similar expressions are found in many parts of the Old Testament. See Num. 14:18, Neh. 9:17, Ps. 86:15, and Jonah 4:2.) This similarity fits the poet's theme of God's gracious forgiveness. For the writer, this is intensely personal as he has stated in verses 2-3.

Although verses 9-18 are part of the appeal to the community, they carry a special message. Not only is the Lord compassionate, gracious, and loving in his forgiveness, but the psalmist adds, "He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities" (verses 9-10). This fact is best illustrated by the

use of three similes given in verses11-13. In these he shows the depth of God's love and the fullness of his forgiveness. His love is "as high as the heavens are above the earth for all who fear him," and he removes our transgressions "as far as the east is from the west." His mercy is "as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him."

In verses 14-16 the writer addresses another vital topic. He has spoken, and continues to speak of the eternity of God and the fact that the Lord is forever and ever. In this block however, he compares that to the frailty of mankind. Human beings are as fragile as the grass and the flower of the field. They are swept away by the wind and even the place which they had occupied is forgotten. Yet, to this psalmist that is all the more reason to praise God for he has extended his love and compassion to human beings, all of whom are transient, fragile and inferior. Isaiah spoke of this in a similar way in Is. 40:6-8 which is quoted in I Pet. 1:24-25.

James L. Mays has an interesting comment on verses 6-18 as a whole. "Does the psalm's connection between God's steadfast love and those who fear the Lord imply that they deserve and earn it by their piety? The psalm gives a twofold answer. Those who sing this psalm know themselves to be forgiven sinners. They do not receive steadfast love because they fear the Lord; they fear the Lord because they have been forgiven. . . . The only claim they make for themselves is the very humblest. 'We are dust,' they say, and 'God remembers that in dealing with us.'" (Mays, *op.cit.,* p. 330.) We should remember that the Bible frequently uses the word "fear" to describe obedient respect not simply the idea of being afraid of the Lord. However, both aspects of fear must be taken seriously. Verses 17-18 effectively tie together the principles of fidelity to the covenant, God's everlasting love, obedience to his precepts, and the grace of his forgiveness. Law and grace do not come into conflict with each other.

Verses 19-22 are concluding reminders of the sovereignty of God. His throne is established in heaven and his kingdom rules over all things. The angels and the mighty ones who do his bidding and obey his word are exhorted to praise him. The heavenly hosts who do his will are exhorted to praise him. The climax of the psalm is the call for all creatures everywhere in his dominion to praise him and join the mighty chorus, "Praise the Lord, O my soul."

Psalm 136

Introduction and Summary

This Hymn of Praise is also thought of as a Hymn of Community Thanksgiving. Its structure gives us insight into one of the liturgical practices of Israel demonstrating that it is truly a Hymn of Praise. The phrase "For his love endures forever" is repeated twenty-six times in the psalm. This structure indicates that it was an antiphonal hymn, *i.e.* where a leader or a section of a chorus or choir sings a line and another section of the chorus or a congregation of worshippers responds. After each of these the phrase is repeated; "For his love endures forever." With other antiphonal music the response may not have been the repetition of a particular phrase. This phrase is found nine times in other psalms and six times in I and II Chronicles where the temple singing is described. See I Chron. 16:34, 41, and II Chron. 5:13, 7:3, 7:6, and 20:21. In both the Hebrew and the LXX prior to the expression "His love endures forever," the word "For" appears. The word is also included in almost every English translation except the NIV. See "Commentary" below.

History shows that the early Christians sometimes used antiphonal singing in a way which was similar to Ps. 136. This is likely the idea of Eph. 5:19 where Paul says that Christians were to "*Speak to one another* in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." Through antiphonal singing they were literally "speaking to one another." Psalms 136 is the only psalm in the Bible which is given over entirely to this type of structure. However, Ps. 118 has a group of antiphonal verses scattered through it. In Deut. 27:14-26 the people were instructed to respond to the Levites by saying "Amen" after each statement in those verses. This is based on the antiphonal practice.

Following the call to worship and praise (verses 1-3) there are two basic themes which occur in the psalm. First, the Lord is Creator of all things (verses 4-9) and second, the Lord is the deliverer, guide, and sustainer of Israel (verses 10-25). This is followed by a final imperative statement to praise the Lord (verse 26). Most scholars believe that Ps. 135 is a companion of Ps. 136 since the two poems deal with similar content. There is no superscription with either of these and their authors and dates of writing are unknown. Most scholars believe that Ps. 136 came from the post-exilic period because of its content, grammatical structure, and linguistic characteristics. The same conclusion for Ps. 135 appears to be reasonable.

Commentary

Verses 1-3 form a call to the congregation or community to come together and praise the Lord. The psalmist gives three reasons for them to respond to this call. The Lord is good (verse 1), he is the God of gods (verse 2), and he is the Lord of lords (verse 3). With each of these statements there is the response, "For his love endures forever." The word from which "Lord" is translated is the personal name of God as revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:15) and on Mt. Sinai (Ex.34:5-6). Some commentators refer to this as the Covenant name of God.

The Hebrew word "hased," translated "love" in each response is a very broad word. It is sometime translated "steadfast love," emphasizing its permanence (RSV, NRSV), "loving kindness," "covenant love," "faithfulness," and "devotion."

Commenting on the meaning of the Hebrew word "hesed" (also spelled "chesed") Mays says, "*Hesed* is the characteristic and activity of reliable helpfulness, the attribute of the Lord most often praised and appealed to in the Psalms. . . The coordination of the items in the recitation with the refrain makes it clear that *hesed* is action; the wonders are a performance of *hesed*." (Mays, *op. cit.,* p. 420.) Edgar Jones speaks of this as "covenant Love, devotion, loving kindness, and steadfast love. It is one of Israel's strongest expressions of love and devotion. (Jones, Edgar. *The Greatest Old Testament Words*, (London: SCM Press), 1964, pp. 38-41.

Verse 4 states that the Lord alone is the one who does great wonders. In a sense, this sets the tone for the remainder of the psalm. Each of the remaining statements – first concerning creation and then concerning the nation of Israel – is really a component of the Lord's great wonders. The psalmist sees all of the wonders of creation as manifestations of the power of the Lord. His constant interventions in Israel's history are also miraculous acts not just observations of his general care for the people. In this whole array of God's wonders the psalmist sees the true identity of the Lord as the God of power, love, and mercy. These are present in every occurrence of God's intervention.

Verses 5-9 enumerate some of the wonders and power of the Lord in creation. The psalmist speaks of the heavens in general, then he specifies the creation of the earth upon the waters, and finally the great lights of heaven – the sun by day and the moon and stars by night.

Verses 10-25 as a whole eulogize the Lord's intervention in Israel's early history. The exodus was the defining event in the creation of the nation. It was at this time that the slaves in Egypt became a nation which was soon to have a land of its own. Israel never forgot that momentous event. The psalmist divided the whole exodus event into four basic categories and he commented on various important parts of each in verses 10-15, 16, 17-22, and 23-25.

Verses 10-15 describe the striking down of Egypt's first-born when God brought Israel out of bondage. With his mighty hand and outstretched arm he divided the Red Sea and guided Israel through on dry land. It was at the Red Sea that the Lord destroyed the army of Pharaoh.

Verse 16 tells of God's care for the people during the wilderness wandering and verses 17-22 speak of the conquest of Canaan. Through God's intervention Sihon the king of the Amorites was defeated as was Og the King of Bashan (verses 19-20). The Lord gave the land as an inheritance to his servant Israel (verses 21-22), as he "remembered us in our low estate" (verse 23). Verses 24-25 summarize it all when the poet says that God "freed us from all our enemies" and he "gives food to every creature."

His conclusion in verse 26 follows quite naturally as he appeals to the whole community: "Give thanks to the God of heaven for his love endures forever."

Psalm 148

Introduction and Summary

The last five psalms in the book are called the Hallelujah Psalms. The book of Psalm is filled with exhortations to praise the Lord and the imperative for all of God's creation – heavenly beings, humans, and all creatures – to praise him. The book draws to a close with these five Hallelujah Hymns of Praise, Ps. 146-150 in a sort of crescendo exclaiming the glory of the Lord. Each of the final five psalms introduces itself with the opening phrase, "Praise the Lord." It is more than just a slogan or the first line of the poem; it is almost as if this were a title for each of the final five Hallelujah Psalms. In this group Ps. 148 presents a series of invitations for the heavens and earth, whether animate or inanimate to praise the Lord. The imperatives "Praise the Lord," "Praise him," or the equivalent occur eighteen times in the fourteen verses of this psalm. In 1893 William J. Kirkpatrick, an American musician, revised the words of this Psalm and put this beautiful poem to music. It is sung in many churches today under the title, "Hallelujah Praise Jehovah."

The psalm divides itself into two sections. Verses 1-6 are a summons to the heavens and the entire celestial world to praise God and verses 7-14 apply the same summons to the entire earth and all its creatures. The inanimate creation is made alive in the psalm and given the ability of speak praises to the Lord. The summons to praise goes from verse 1 to verse 5a. Verses 5b and 6 give the basis of the summons; "For he commanded and they were created," "he set them in place forever and ever," and "he gave a decree which will never pass away." His exhortation is universal. He uses the word "all" ten times as he issues his summons to praise the Lord. The psalm is so intense and beautiful that the reader easily finds himself sharing the deep emotions of the writer. These are some of the reasons it is considered one of the most beautiful psalms in the entire collection.

Commentary

Verse 1 begins with an imperative to praise the Lord. There is a synonymous parallelism in verse 1 in which the poet once again calls for praise of the Lord. He then expands it to "Praise the Lord from the heavens; Praise him in the heights. There are nineteen psalms which are generally placed in the category of Hymns of Praise. Eleven of these begin with the phrase, "Praise the Lord" or very similar words such as "Give thanks to the Lord," "Shout for joy," "Sing joyfully to the Lord," or "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name."

Verses 2-5a address the heavenly beings (angels and the heavenly hosts) and then the created heavens (the entire cosmos) calling on all celestial creation to praise the Lord. Many other Hymns of Praise incorporate the physical creation in some way. The expression in verse 4, "heavens of heavens" (in most English translations) or "highest heavens" (NIV) may be referring to multiple "heavens" as mentioned in II Cor. 12:2, 4 or it may be a figure of speech designed to encompass all of God's celestial creation as well as the place of God's throne. The sun, moon, and stars were a mystery and an allurement to ancient people. Pagan societies worshipped them on their rooftops as they gave homage to "the starry hosts." The sun and moon were worshipped

individually having deities representing them. Israel was constantly warned about the evil of bowing down to the starry hosts (II Kgs. 17:16, 23:4, Jer. 19:13, Zeph. 1:15). The theology of the psalmist is quite different from this. Instead of seeing the heavenly bodies as objects to be worshipped, he saw them as creations of the all powerful Creator God who spoke them into existence and by whose might they are sustained.

In verse 4 the psalmist speaks of the "waters above the heavens." Some commentators believe that the writer of this psalm thought, as ancient people generally thought, that the heavens were made up of a vast sea of water which provided the rain for the earth. This is an unwarranted conclusion since we know that they ancients understood that clouds brought rain. This is affirmed in many places in the Old Testament. See I Kgs. 18:44-45, Prov. 16:15.

Verses 5-6 give the basis for all of the praise commanded above; "For he commanded and they were created. He set them in place forever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away." Compare Jer. 31:35-36. In some translations the phrase, "he gave a decree" is rendered "he fixed their bounds." Both the Hebrew and Greek (LXX) can be translated in this way referring to the fact that God "decreed" that the heavenly bodies remain as he placed them and that decree can never be removed. In much the same way Psalm 19 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God." The silent voice of creation gives its testimony in unmistakably clear tones.

Verses 7-10 move from celestial praise to the earthly realms. The sea monsters and all that are in the depths of the ocean are called on to praise him. The elements of the weather – lightning, hail, snow, clouds and stormy winds – are all called to the praise of God. The pagans had gods of the storms, weather, etc. – Baal was the god of storms and rain – and they worshipped them and feared their power. Much of what those worshippers did was done to attract the favor of the gods who controlled the weather. Agriculture and commerce, as well as the health and wellbeing of society depended on favorable weather. The psalmist however sees these, not as divine forces to be feared or worshipped but as evidence of the power of the great Creator whose creation is good, and whose people he loves. These forces are called on to bow down to him in praise. The word "fire" rather than "lightning" usually occurs in translations of these verses.

Verses 11-12 move to the crowning glory of God's creation – mankind – to render praise to him. No one is left out. The kings, princes, and all rulers of the earth are called on to offer their praises to the Lord. The old men, young men, maidens, and children are all summoned by this chorus of praise. This summons for all creation to bow down in praise is more than simple poetic license. There is a grand theological theme which is all important. God is the wise Designer, Creator, and Sustainer of all things. There is a serious intent behind the psalm. Not only is it a beautiful poem but it has the power to probe the reader's heart as well. Within the vast array of all of God's creation, man is the only being we know of who is capable of willfully choosing to praise him or willfully choosing to refuse to do so. This accentuates even more strongly the obligation of all human beings to join in the chorus of praise.

Verses 13-14 state once more the reasons for our praise. "His name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens. He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all the saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart."

Chapter III
Psalms of Individual Lament

Introduction to Psalms of Individual and Community Lament

The psalms of lament, both individual and community, form the largest group in the Psalter. More than one-third of the book is made up of these types of poems. An inborn part of these psalms is their prayers for deliverance from the catastrophic circumstances which have overtaken them. Sometimes these prayers are overtly spoken while at other times they are implied. In a very important way, they teach us how to pray, the importance of developing confidence in the Lord, and the need to exercise faith which leads to our dependence on God.

These psalms unveil the raw emotions of individuals and the community as they approach God, pleading with him for deliverance and intervention and sometimes expressing their dismay in what they perceive as God's delay in coming to their side or even his lack of concern for their plight. In these psalms we will see some of their complaints expressed rather boldly. Here there is an interesting combination of the immanence of God – his closeness to his people – and the transcendence of God – the fact that he is eternal, completely divine, invisible, all powerful, all knowing, present everywhere, and incomprehensible. He is beyond our reach, yet he is a close and loving Father. The psalms of lament vividly portray these characteristics of God while demonstrating our incredible need to be close to him.

Psalms 42 and 43

Introduction and Summary

These two psalms describe the emotional and true experience of every child of God who faces himself in a moment of unembellished honesty. This is no easy task and all too often we try to avoid such uncomfortable intrapersonal encounters. The uneasy and downcast spirit of the psalmist challenges every reader to face, with personal honesty, his or her own loneliness and feelings of abandonment. The psalmist's constant return to express his total dependence on the Lord is also a shared experience of every child of God.

The superscription attributes Ps. 42 to "The Sons of Korah. Psalm 43 has no superscription. According to I Chron. 6:16, 22 a person named Korah was a Levite, and I Chron. 6:31-32 speaks of musicians being appointed by David to serve "in the house of the Lord." The statement in I Chron. 6:37 confirm that Korah was among those appointed by David. Although the psalm is attributed to "the Sons of Korah," and we have no way of knowing how far removed from the time of David those sons may have lived. Therefore these facts give us no help in trying to identify a time period for the composition of the psalm. The temple had not been built when David made those appointments and commentators generally believe that "the house of the Lord" was referring to the tabernacle or similar structure. The original Tabernacle appears to have been destroyed by the Philistines about the time of the battle of Aphek during the judgeship of Eli. See I Sam. 4:1-11. Archaeology has confirmed findings at Shiloh showing the probability that the city was destroyed at about the same time that the battle of Aphek took place.

Psalms 42 and 43 are closely related in their subject matter and general mood causing most commentators to conclude that they should be treated as one poem. Peter Craigie lists three reasons for placing these two psalms together. (a) Some Hebrew manuscripts present the psalms as a single unit. (b) Psalm 43 has no title (superscription), which is unusual for the writings in Book II of the Psalms. Only three Psalms out of the thirty in Book II are without superscriptions. (c) A common refrain is found in both of the psalms.

42:2–6	(a) Lament (vv 2–5) (b) Refrain (v 6)
42:7–12	(a) Lament (vv 7–11) (b) Refrain (v 12)
43:1–5	(a) Prayer (vv 1–4) (b) Refrain (v 5)

(Craigie, *op, cit,* on CD.)

In 42:5 the psalmist engages in a soliloquy - a brief period of talking to himself. The same soliloquy reappears in 42:11 and 43:5. This lends credence to the probability that 42 and 43 were originally together as one psalm. No explanation is given for the separation of the two sections

into separate Psalms.

Psalm 42 falls into two parts. Verses 1-6a form the first lament and verses 6b-11 form the second. Psalm 43 forms the third part of the poem as a whole. Each section of the combined poem ends with the same refrain: "Why are you downcast O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (42:5, 11, 43:5). Some commentators have the first lament concluding at verse 5 but this seems to leave the expression "my God" by itself.

Beginning with 42:1 the poet expresses his thirst for God. Taken alone this does not sound like the introduction to a psalm of lament, but in the context of the entire psalm we see the poet's loneliness as he expresses his thirst for the Lord. In 42:4 it seems that he was at one time a musician leading worshippers into the house of God in a festive joyful procession. Those times have past and their memory appears to account for some of his depression. Verses 4-6 are his reminiscence of times gone by. Lawrence Toombs and other commentators believe that 42:6 indicates that the writer was living in the north near Mt. Hermon, or perhaps that he was an exile or a prisoner in that locality. (Toombs, *op. cit.*, p. 275.) In the second section, verses 7-11, the poet draws on those reminiscences to intensify the expression of his dependence on God for the solution to his loneliness and feeling of abandonment. In this he experiences the presence of God. The solution is found in his closing statement. In 43:5 he tells himself, "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."

Commentary

Verses 1-6a form the first section of Ps. 42. Verses 1-2 picture the poet engaged in a beautiful prayer of praise and dependence. He acknowledges that his very existence depends on the living God just as the deer in the forest goes in search of the streams of water. As simple and plentiful as water is on the earth, it is our most valuable commodity. No life can survive without it. Perhaps the deer has gone to an old familiar stream only to find that it has dried up because of the hot summer and a lack of rainfall. Just as his body cannot survive without water, so his soul cannot survive without the water of life. Fortunately he knows his need, and is anxious to rediscover the source of strength and renewal. The intensity of his need causes him to ask, "When can I go meet with God?"

As we continue reading the psalm this introduction seems a little strange. He has beautifully expressed great praise of God and knowledge of his own need, yet as the poem unfolds we see more than just a confession of that need but a feeling of abandonment and loneliness. Verses 1-2 must be seen in the context of the whole psalm (along with Ps. 43) before we can understand and experience the profound disposition of his heart.

Verses 3-4 call attention to the past when the psalmist has led processions of worshippers to the temple of the Lord. These memories bring tears to his eyes because he is now deprived of this great privilege. At this point we begin to see the depth of meaning in the introductory statements of his thirst for the presence of the Lord so vividly experienced in the corporate worship. It is not simply that he thirsts for the presence of God but his deep sorrow of heart comes because he is

now deprived of that experience with the other faithful children of the covenant. It is true that the faithful servant of God meets the Lord in the privacy of his own room (Matt. 6:5-7) but it is equally true that there is no substitute for the corporate worship of the Lord in the fellowship of the saints. The poet's sorrow is so deep that he symbolically describes his tears as his only food. Adding to this sorrow is the taunting of his enemies who say, "Where is your God?" This taunting may have come from his captors who were chastising him about his God's lack of protection or intervention. The pagans thought of the gods competing with each other for dominance and control of humans. If the poet's enemies were also his captors it is easy to understand their question.

In verse 4 the composer recalls his past experiences leading the procession to the house of God. There were shouts of joy and thanksgiving as throngs of worshippers gathered for the festive experience. Now, all of that is gone, and he finds himself mourning over this great loss.

In verse 5 we have the first occurrence of his soliloquy. He asks himself the probing question, "Why are you downcast?" and he answers it with the strong self-exhortation and affirmation of faith; "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him my Savior and my God." It is interesting that throughout the psalm he speaks of himself as "Soul." The word is descriptive of one's entire being, not just the "spirit" of man although the poet speaks of the "soul [life] within me" 42:5.

Verses 6-10 are the second lament of his exiled estate but they also express the psalmist's determination to remember the Lord no matter where he might be. He, just like each of us, is wrestling with his doubts about God's care, his own fears, and his feeling of abandonment. His soul is downcast, but he knows the solution to the problem. He may know that God is the source of strength and care but perhaps he sees himself as unable to tap into that source of consolation. He makes the statement, "Therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon – from Mount Mizar" (42:6). Some commentators believe this is more a wish of the psalmist than a reality. The location of Mount Mizar is not known. However, the location of Mt. Hermon is known as well as the fact that it is the source of a good portion of the waters for the Jordan River. The question arises then, "Is his statement in vs. 7a a confession of his feeling of desperate need for which he sees little or no hope, or is it the confession of his feeling of loss accompanied by the hope expressed in verses 8-9?" Verse 8 indicates that he is relying on prayer and the enduring love of God.

Most commentators believe that he has a feeling of abandonment and hopelessness. Toombs characterizes this portion with these words; "Lonely and isolated among enemies, he feels his homesickness beat in his ears like the noise of the chaotic underworld ocean rushing to overwhelm him and carry him down to the realms of death." (Toombs, *op. cit.* p. 275.) The depth of his sorrows is meeting the depth of waves and breakers. Although this is true, the psalmist finds hope from God who is his rock. There is despair mixed with his hope as he asks, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me saying all day long, 'Where is your God?'" Ps. 42:9-10. The psalmist's struggle is evident and his feeling of abandonment is real but he knows that God is his only hope. The refrain from verse 5 is repeated in verse 11. The latter part of the refrain, 11b, repeats his instructions to himself to put his hope in God who is his Savior.

The completion of this lament is in Ps. 43 where the poet calls for vindication. In 43:1-2 he calls his captor(s) "an ungodly nation," and he seeks rescue "from deceitful and wicked men." The quandary and conflict continue as he expresses his feeling of God's apparent rejection. Perhaps he wonders if his captivity and suffering are evidence that God has abandoned him. Yet he is confessing, "You are my God, my stronghold." His fears and clashes are beyond his understanding. This inward struggle of faith is common to all men who face the challenges of their own weaknesses.

Verse 3 is a prayer for God to send his light and truth to guide the psalmist "to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell." This is reminiscent of God's promise to dwell among the people at the time of the building and dedication of both the Tabernacle and the Temple. See Ex.29:44-46 and I Kgs. 9:1-3.

These two psalms, taken as one, demonstrate the need for God's people to come together in corporate worship. The joy of such worship has penetrated deeply into the heart of the psalmist and now his suffering is intense because he is being deprived of that experience. He is no longer leading the procession of worshippers and this deprivation gives him a feeling of despair. This can only be remedied by experiencing God's presence even in his captivity and anticipating his return to join the community of worshippers. He describes this by saying, "Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God."

The final refrain in verse 5 is a repeat of 42:5, 11. Is this a continued lament and feeling of God's abandonment followed by his repeated instructions to himself to put his hope in God? Or, on the other hand, is it an expression of the despair which he had experienced but has now conquered because he has, in fact, place his trust and hope in "my Savior and my God?

Psalms 51

Introduction and Summary

In the Old Testament one sentence is basic for all who come face to face with their own sins. That sentence is, "I have sinned." This simple yet profound truth is as difficult to confront and utter today as it was for ancient people. Psalm 51 is the personification of that confession. Nowhere in the Bible is there a more penetrating confession than in this psalm. The text is universal, crossing the boundaries between Old Testament and New Testament. All who read this psalm, both Jew and Christian, can experience the reality of wrong-doing, the guilt of sin, and the need of forgiveness which is so vividly displayed here. Arnold B. Rhodes begins his comments on this psalm by saying:

> This is the greatest of all penitential prayers, biblical and extrabiblical. Through the centuries men with a burden of guilt have been led to the very throne of grace by its words. The author is not only conscious of being a sinner in general, he is also conscious of being a heinous sinner in some specific way. Yet, he is not one of the habitually wicked who refuse to repent. The saint is the sinner who repents; the wicked man is the sinner who refuses to throw himself upon the mercy or God. It is no wonder that in tradition the Psalm was associated with David in his deep sin and soul-searching repentance (II Sam. 11-12).

(Rhodes, *op. cit.,* p. 85.)

Although the psalmist perceives his sin to be against God alone, this does not preclude the possibility that whatever his crime against God might have been, it could also have involved injury to another human being. The point he makes in vs. 4 is that the magnitude of his guilt is rooted in his violation of his covenant with the Almighty and his broken relationship with God. This surpasses all injury to another human being but it does not mean that no other human being might have been involved. Few of our sins are so narrowly confined to ourselves and God.

In many of the Psalms of Lament the psalmist asks for punishment of his enemies. Not so in this Psalm. It is all about his confession of personal responsibility for his evil deed. He sees himself so deeply guilty that he traces it all the way back to his infancy. This has been used as an affirmation of the human family's guilt of Adam's sin. However this is not his point at all. First, the Jews have never had a doctrine that babies are born with the guilt of Adam's sin as professed so widely in Catholicism and much of Protestantism. Second, the psalmist is profoundly aware of his sin and he honestly confesses it. He does not blame Adam or a weakness brought on by Adam's sin but he confesses a sin of his own choosing. His unworthiness before God is not only manifested in this sin, but in an entire life of unworthiness. His behavior has brought this into the bright light of his own conscience as never before.

His penitence is not rooted in his fear of punishment but in the reality that he has sinned against God. He pleads for the renewal of a right spirit within himself. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." He would offer sacrifices but he knows that they are not a substitute for humility of heart. Sacrificial ritual, though valuable when performed with

true sincerity, is not a replacement for a broken spirit and contrite heart. His plea for mercy is not based on his own worthiness, but on the depth and breadth of God's grace in forgiveness.

The superscription over this psalm states that it was written by David when he was confronted by the prophet Nathan concerning his sin with Bathsheba. However, that tradition has been called into question by most scholars. In part, this is based on the statement in verse 4 where the poet says that he has sinned only against God. This is thought to be a strange statement when considering the entire story of David's sins with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. A post-exilic date is advocated by James Mays and many others based partly on the similarities of content in Isaiah 40-66, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Other scholars have assigned the psalm to a period just prior to, or shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Many believe that verses 18-19 were added by a later editor, but Mays says that a post-exilic date makes good sense out of the last two verses of the psalm and he considers them appropriate. (Mays, *op.cit.*, pp. 198-200.)

Mays also considers the psalm to be a prayer composed on behalf of the entire congregation, not simply a personal lament. He says, "The prayer seeks a cleansing and purification from all transgressions, iniquities, and sins (vv. 1-2, 9). It may have been composed for use by the congregation, and individuals as part of it, in connection with the Day of Atonement (see Lev. 16:30). Understanding the psalm as a prayer composed for the community and for individuals in their identity with the community has important consequences for its interpretation and liturgical use." (Mays, *op. cit.*, p. 199.) Some scholars such as J. Stewart Perowne hold to the accuracy of the superscription and defend the Davidic authorship while a few others have supposed that it was composed by David at the time of Absalom's rebellion (II Sam. 15-17) but there is no concrete evidence of this. (Perowne, *op. cit.*, pp. 412-413.)

This psalm is somewhat difficult to classify because it has strong characteristics of a number of different categories. It is penitential as well as lamenting. Various scholars make penitential psalms a subcategory of the individual laments. In some psalms of confession the psalmist also includes a petition for the Lord to take vengeance on the poet's enemies, almost implying that the one who is guilty also has a sort of "right" to the forgiveness and protection of God. See Ps. 6, 38, 102, and 143. In Ps. 51 there is a vivid internalizing of the personal problem of evil and the psalmist shows that neither he nor anyone else ever has any "claim" on God's grace of forgiveness. No plea for destruction of his enemies is found in the psalm.

The psalm divides itself into four sections. The first, verses 1-6, constitutes the poet's initial plea for forgiveness and his confession of sin. He confesses the gravity of his offense and affirms God's right to judge him. In the second section, verses 7-12, he continues to pray for forgiveness as he describes his need to be cleansed in his spirit and his deep desire to once again experience the joy of salvation. The need for a pure heart and a steadfast spirit are always before him. He confronts the fearsome thought that he could be cast off forever and that God' own spirit of holiness could be taken away from him. In the third section, verses 13-17, the poet claims that forgiveness and spiritual renewal will better equip him to be a witness of God's mercy towards transgressors. He asks that his lips and his mouth may be opened by the Lord that he might be able to sing of the Lord's righteousness and proclaim God's praise. In verses 16-17 of this section he returns to his petition for forgiveness and cleansing, knowing that sacrifices and other offerings are not the essence of righteousness. Instead, God seeks a broken and contrite heart. In

the final section, verses 18-19, he asks the Lord to build up Jerusalem where righteous sacrifices can be offered to the Lord.

Commentary

The first section, verses 1-6, begins with the psalmist's plea for mercy, citing God's unfailing love and compassion. His sin haunts him, and he makes no excuses for his evil, nor does he try to justify any of his action. Remorse is sometimes confused with repentance. Neither regret nor feelings of guilt constitute repentance. Paul contrasts these in II Cor. 7:8-11. Our poet appeals to God to "blot out my transgression" but he depends entirely on the "your great compassion" for the gift of forgiveness. The expression "blot out" is commonly used in the Old Testament to describe God's forgiveness. It may mean to wipe it out from the record book as if a debt had been expunged. In Ex. 32:32 Moses uses the same word and again in Num. 5:23 the idea is repeated. It is also used mean to wipe something away leaving no evidence that it ever existed as in II Kgs. 21:13. The psalmist not only has a vivid awareness of the severity of his guilt, but an equally important awareness of the meaning of forgiveness.

The use of parallelism in the two opening verses gives us additional information on the meaning of forgiveness. The poet has asked for mercy and the blotting out of his transgressions. This request is followed by the phrase, "wash away all my iniquity and cleanses me from my sin." He understands and confesses the inward spiritual pollution of his very being, not just the immediate consequences of his action. These descriptions of forgiveness are used frequently in the Old Testament. See Is. 1:16-18, Jer. 2:22, and Mal. 3:2-3.

Verse 3 expresses his true confession. "For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me." The word "transgressions" is plural but the word "sin" is singular. In these parallel statements the psalmist incorporates all of the evil in his life, not simply the "sin" which he confesses at this time. This statement begins with the word "For." It must not be thought of as a reason God should forgive him – "Forgive me because I am fully aware of my sin" – but the devastating reality of guilt and breaking of the treasured relationship between himself and God – "The evil that I have done has broken the most important relationship of my life and I cannot live without my Lord." In order to see the true force of this psalm we must understand this phrase, "My sin is always before me." Once again, the emphasis is not on the physical consequences of his sin but on his profound sorrow for his offense against God.

Verse 4 has a phrase which has perplexed many commentators; "Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." How could David have said this in reference to his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and arranging for the murder of her husband, Uriah? The answer however is not as complex as some would suppose. The writer, whether David or some other, is so overwhelmed with the weight of his evil deed(s) that he sees the break in the God-man relationship as infinitely more important than the guilt in the human-to-human relationship could ever be. This is not an attempt to minimize the human-to-human aspect of these deeds but to emphasize the immeasurable meaning of the God-man relationship. Not only has he come face to face with himself, but he has also come face to face with the majesty and holiness of God.

Verse 5 is frequently used to defend the doctrines of inherited original sin. Once again, we must

see this phrase as the author and his original recipients would have seen it. The Jews had no doctrine of original sin as held in contemporary Catholicism or in some Protestant churches. This is evident from both Biblical and non-biblical information. Nowhere in the Law of Moses or the prophets is this taught. Ezekiel's statement is characteristic: "The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son." (Ezek. 18:20) The Jewish position on inherited guilt from original sin is addressed in an article by Alfred J. Kolatch: "The doctrine of original sin is totally unacceptable to Jews . . . Jews believe that man enters the world free of sin, with a soul that is pure and innocent and untainted." (Source: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Original_Sin.html, Alfred J. Kolatch, *The Jewish Book of Why/The Second Jewish Book of Why*, (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1989), "Judaism's Rejection of Original Sin," The Jewish Virtual Library, The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise.) Not only is this the contemporary Jewish position but it is also the Old Testament teaching on the topic.

There is a tendency to confuse the *consequences* of Adam's sin with the *guilt* of Adam's sin. All of us suffer because of Adam's sin (consequences), but none bears the guilt of Adam's sin. A family may suffer the consequences of the sins of an alcoholic father, but they are not guilty of his sins. Within Catholicism the doctrine of original sin led to the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary. That is, Mary's parents did not pass down the guilt of Adam's sin to Mary. According to this doctrine, since Mary was "immaculately" conceived she could give birth to Jesus without passing original sin down to him. This had been debated among Catholic writers for centuries. Thomas Aquinas, (1225-1274) was part of that discussion. In the 1400's some Catholic theologians advocated the doctrine of inherited guilt of Adam's sin but others called it heresy. In 1483 Pope Sixtus IV censured both sides of the controversy stating that "the matter has not yet been decided by the Roman Church and Apostolic See." (Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian* Church, 2nd edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 271.) Henry Bettenson has a portion of the text of the Bull of Pope Pius IX in the book just cited. It was not until 1854 that Pope Pius IX "formally declared the immaculate conception to be a dogma of the Roman Church. By this was meant that from the first moment of her existence Mary was 'immune from all taint of original sin.'" (Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1953), p. 1088.) The Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception should not be confused with the Biblical teaching of the virgin birth. They are two entirely different doctrines. The doctrine of inherited original sin raises an important problem with reference to Jesus himself since Heb. 2:17 states that "He was made like his bothers in every way."

What then is the psalmist saying in verse 5? It is important to remember that this is poetry not prose. Poetry deals in overstatements, exaggerations, symbolic statements, and even statements which are contrary to fact in order to emphasize an important point. See Ps. 5:9 and Ps. 14:1-3 where the poet says there are none who are good and none can be trusted. These cannot be taken as absolutes any more than Ps. 51:5 can be taken as an absolute. The psalmist is so overcome with a sense of his own guilt that he sees his very existence from the time he was conceived until the present to have been enveloped in sin. He lives in a sinful world, his parents were sinful. He feels his guilt so strongly that he describes it symbolically as a lifelong condition.

Notice that he speaks of his mother being in sin when he was conceived. At one time this statement was used to teach that there is something inherently evil about sexual activity even between husband and wife. Those who held to this point of view believed that the psalmist was saying, "My mother was committing sin in the act of my conception." Once again, we must remember that the poet is overstating things in order to describe the intensity of his thought. Being overwhelmed with guilt, he basically says, "My whole life, from its beginning has been one of sin." That, in fact, is not a true statement but one which poetic license certainly allows. Verse 6 states that the key to all of this is the realization that outward behavior is not the test of either righteousness or evil. God desires truth in the inner man, not just in his overt behavior.

Verses 7-12 constitute a more lengthy prayer for forgiveness and renewal than what is stated earlier. Once again we see the poet's use of parallelism, and we benefit from his variety of expressions. He asks to be cleansed with hyssop and washed that he may be whiter than snow. The latter phrase shows the psalmist's confidence in the complete forgiveness of God. Only the Lord can return him to a state of purity. In many translations the word for "cleanse" is translated "purge" which is stronger. Purging carries the idea of complete cleaning, inwardly and outwardly. This appears to be the writer's objective, especially when we see how he describes himself and his need for renewal. In Lev. 14:4ff we see the procedure to be used in cleansing a leper and in Num 19:6ff there is reference to cleansing of a person under other circumstances. Hyssop was used in these ceremonies so it is evident that the poet is referring to a familiar cleansing under the Law. The whiteness of snow is frequently used to describe the purity of the soul. "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow," Is. 1:18.

In verses 8-9 he continues his petition to God, seeking for a return to the blissful state which he describes as "joy and gladness." His sorrow is so deeply felt that he says the Lord has crushed his bones. The only solution for this is for the Lord to hide his face from the sins he has committed. Once again he speaks of the blotting out of his evil deeds.

In verse 10, just as in verse 6 the poet cries out for inward holiness but that comes only from God. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." One of the interesting aspects of the poet's confession is that he is not asking for a blessing in return for his petition for a "clean heart." James Mays says that the Hebrew word which is translated "create" means to bring into existence that which was not there before. Mays continues with this observation: "It is important to understand just what is being asked here and how it is related to the other parts of the psalm. . . Many of the prayers for help say, 'Change my situation so I may praise you.' This one says, 'Change me; I am the problem.'" (Mays, *op. cit.* p. 202.) The parallelism in verse 10 touches heart and spirit, not so much to designate "parts" to be created or renewed but to communicate the message of wholeness or completeness. This can be seen in strong contrast to his confession of profound guilt in verse 5. The psalmist is not simply asking for the blotting out of his sin in forgiveness, but for a change in his whole being. Without this he would be the same corrupt inward person and this is not his desire. His words "wash me," "purge (cleanse) me," "create a new heart," and "renew a steadfast spirit" all show the depth of his penitence. Each of these has a liturgical-ritual character.

Verses 11-12 express both the negative and positive parts of his petition. He pleads with God not to "cast me away from your presence or take your holy Spirit away from me." The expres-

sion "holy Spirit" is open to a number of interpretations. In the Old Testament it is found only here and in Is. 63:10-11 where it is used twice. Some commentators believe that this is a reference to the Trinitarian concept of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as we see in the New Testament.

Among the most widely used English versions only in the NASV and the NIV did the translators capitalize the words "Holy Spirit" indicating that they appear to have the Trinitarian concept in mind. The others translate them with lower case letters indicating that they do not believe this refers to the Trinity. We must remember that Judaism never has entertained the possibility of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit although some go to Gen. 1:26 where the plural "us" is used speaking of God. We must remember that the Hebrew word for God is plural, and this would be a proper grammatical construction. In addition, the first person plural is frequently used when a speaker or writer is referring to himself. The Spirit of God is frequently spoken of in the Old Testament but not necessarily speaking of the Trinitarian concept. Gen. 1:2 speaks of the spirit of God hovering over the waters, and in Gen. 6:3 God says his "spirit will not contend with men forever." There are many other examples. It seems evident that the poet is speaking of God's spirit, which is holy, making the petition that God will not withdraw from him. In I Sam. 10:6 the spirit of the Lord was promised to Saul, and in I Sam. 16:23 there is a contrast between the spirit from God coming upon Saul and the evil spirit leaving him. In I Sam. 19:9 an evil spirit is spoken of as coming from the Lord. There are many other examples and these references are given to show the varied use of the word "spirit." In Ps. 51:11 the psalmist does not appear to be speaking of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as promised and described in the New Testament.

In verse 12 the psalmist sees that when his own spirit is renewed, a clean heart has been created in him, and his relationship to God has been restored, only then can the Lord bring back to him the joy of his salvation and grant him a willing spirit to sustain him.

When God has accomplished these things by his mercy and goodness, the psalmist saw that he could then proclaim God's goodness to others and become an inspiration to sinners and transgressors (Ps. 51:13-17). However, immediately after making that statement (vs. 13) he returns to his own guilt. He will then sing of God's righteousness.

In verse 14 he pleads for the Lord to save him from bloodguilt. This word generally referred to crimes of murder (Ex. 22:3) or an accidental killing which was the result of negligence (Deut. 22:8). This was a capital crime and this statement of the psalmist may mean that he has committed such a crime and fears the punishment. On the other hand he might be asking the Lord to keep him from committing a crime of bloodshed. Some commentators believe this should be translated simply "blood" or "bloodshed" rather than "bloodguilt" concluding that the psalmist fears that his own life is in danger from an accusing enemy. Whatever the true meaning of the statement, the poet is reaffirming his dependence on God for protection as well as forgiveness. In the minds of some commentators this is an additional reason to conclude that David wrote this psalm as the superscription claims. Craigie believes that this is a symbolic statement. He says, "Perhaps the best interpretation in 51:16 is that of 'deadly guilt' – guilt for which one could be held responsible unto death (as in Ezek. 3:17-19; 33:7-9); the prophet is made answerable for the 'blood' – life /death – of people; (Ps. 9:13; 30:10). This meaning fits well with the emphasis on the inadequacy of sacrifice in v. 18." (Peter Craigie, *op. cit.*, on CD.)

With this forgiveness and protection the psalmist says he could sing of the Lord's salvation. Rhodes mentions that the Hebrew word translated "righteousness" (NIV) can also be translated "deliverance" or "salvation." (Rhodes, *op. cit.* p. 87.) In a different setting and with a different mood some people might conclude that the poet is thinking in terms of a "works transaction" with God as if to say, "Lord if you will forgive and protect me, I will publically proclaim your righteousness." However the whole tenor of the psalm is against this conclusion. Instead, the psalmist appears to be saying, "Lord, I can only express my deep gratitude for your love and forgiveness by proclaiming your salvation, deliverance and righteousness to others." Verse 15 is a plea that God will open his lips that he may be able to sing these words of praise to the Lord.

Verses 16-17 fit into this mood. Throughout the psalm the poet speaks of his profound sorrow for his sins but also his deep desire to proclaim God's grace of forgiveness. The key to forgiveness is not to offer more and more sacrifices but to become God's contrite man. The Lord is not simply interested in forms, ceremonies, and rituals such as sacrifices. The sacrificial system was never meant to communicate the idea of the sufficiency of animal sacrifices, but to demonstrate the overwhelming seriousness and cost of sin. Many of the prophets present this important truth. See Is. 1:10-14, Hos. 6:6, Am. 5:21-24, and Mic. 6:1-8.

The psalmist is not discrediting the sacrifices of the Law, but he is addressing the shallowness of form and ritual when they become substitutes for humility, integrity, and sincere obedience. Therefore he says that God's interest is not in outward conformity to liturgical or ritual law but he seeks in mankind the inwards humility of a broken and contrite heart. This, God will never despise.

The final section of the psalm, verses 18-19, has come under criticism. Some commentators believe that these verses were added later by an editor who was reacting against the appearance of rejection of the sacrificial system based on verse 16. W. R. Taylor exemplifies this position speaking of verses 18-19 as an appendix. He writes, "These verses . . . were added by a later hand to modify the psalmist's bold disparagement of the ritual offerings. According to this appendix, the suspension of the sacrifices is due only to the state of things at Jerusalem but when the city has been restored by God's help sacrifices in rich abundance will be resumed in the proper and traditional manner. 'Sacrifices of righteousness:' those that are right or correct ritually." (William R. Taylor, *The Interpreter's Bible: The Book of Psalms*, Vol. IV, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), p. 272.) Taylor believes that this appendix was post-exilic, and that the city of Jerusalem was still in ruins at that time. Most scholars, both Catholic and Protestant, take similar positions although some are not as severe as Taylor.

The psalmist may not be thinking of the rebuilding of Jerusalem because it was in ruins, but through poetic expression he states his devotion and loyalty to the city and the temple. He could be looking forward to the day when God would restore the spiritual grandeur of the city which had suffered so greatly during the Divided Kingdom period. The temple had been looted by various invaders, worship of the Lord was grossly neglected, immorality was openly practiced and idolatry was rampant. Even the sacrifices made to the Lord were empty formalities. The "Holy City" was no longer holy. Perhaps the psalmist is asking the Lord to restore Jerusalem's security, symbolically expressed as "build up the walls of Jerusalem." In verses 16-17 he did not repudiated the sacrificial practices of the Law but expressed the need to return to the deeper and

true spiritual meaning of these sacrifices. When the people have learned the lessons of contrition and humility and will return to the Lord, then the sacrifices and burnt offerings will regain their original and true meaning. Then the Lord will take delight, not in the empty forms and ceremonies of the pseudo-religious people of the past, but in the broken and contrite hearts of people who have returned to God and to the true meaning of the sacrifices.

Psalms 61

Introduction and Summary

This psalm has a mixed form. It is generally classified as a psalm of individual lament, but it also contains a prayer for the king (vss. 6-7) which is not characteristic of psalms in this category. However, this is not the only psalm with this mixture of form. Many commentators believe that the entire psalm is the king praying, speaking in the first person in the beginning and ending of the psalm, but speaking in the third person in verses 6-7. Rhodes refers to it as a royal lament. "The most reasonable approach to this Psalm is to consider it a lament of a king who is sorely troubled." (Rhodes, *op. cit.*, p. 96.)

Although the psalm is ascribed to David in the superscription, many scholars date it in various periods of the Divided Monarchy. Some, including Perowne assign it to the time of Absalom's rebellion. In that case the desire to dwell in the Lord's tent could refer to David's desire to be back in Jerusalem where he could worship once again in Zion. The superscription in the Syriac Version assigns it to the time when Jonathan informed David of Saul's intent to kill David. Perowne says, "There is no reason to doubt that David was the author, and the language of ver. 2 renders it probable that it was during his persecution by Saul or during the rebellion of Absalom. Verse 4 makes the latter the more probable occasion." (Perowne, *op. cit.*, p. 77.) On the other hand some commentators believe that it originated shortly before the exile (597 B.C.) and that the prayer for the king could have been for Zedekiah or Jehoiachin.

The psalm is only eight verses long, but it divides itself into two main sections. Verses 1-5 give the introduction, prayer, and the desire of the psalmist to dwell in God's "tent." Verses 6-8 give us the hopes of the king and his vow to sing the praises of God forever.

Commentary

Verse 1 of the opening section (vss. 1-5) is the psalmist's introduction in which he simply implores God to listen to his prayer. Marvin Tate says that some of the Babylonian psalms open with a list of divine names (including the names of the gods) but the Biblical psalms simply use the address "God" or "Lord" in their opening. (Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 51-100,* Vol. 20, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher), 1998, on CD.)

In verse 2 the expression, "From the ends of the earth I call you," is thought by some to refer to a place far from Jerusalem possibly indicating that the author is in exile or fleeing from an enemy. See verse 3 where the writer speaks of his foe. Toombs believes he is a prisoner. (Toombs, *op. cit.*, p. 280.) If the writer is the king this could be referring to David when he fled from Absalom. Other scholars believe it may be symbolic, referring to the poet's brush with death. Both of these may be possible since they are not mutually exclusive. Perowne, Mays, and others believe that this a symbolic description of the psalmist's feeling of detachment from the sanctuary and he has almost exhausted his spiritual and emotional resources. Since his heart is growing faint some believe that he is very ill, and may not survive.

The poet uses four metaphors to describe his need for God's security and protection. There is the "rock," the "tower of strength," the "tent," and the "wings" of a bird caring for its young. Each has its own unique character.

Whatever may be in the psalmist's mind at this point, he needs to cling to the "rock that is higher than I." A rock almost always symbolizes a place of safety or strength. The translation, "Lead me to the rock" is an imperative but it can also be rendered "You will lead me" which is a statement of future confidence. This rock is symbolic of salvation (deliverance), protection, and security but the psalmist cannot find that protection through his own strength. The Lord must lead him. The meaning is that the psalmist longs to dwell in the safety and security of God's protection. Some have thought that this may refer to the bedrock on which the temple was built on Mt. Zion.

In verse 3 he expresses his feeling of security with God because, "For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe." The strong tower refers to the custom of building walled cities with massive towers or citadels spaced around the wall. The archaeological evidence of this practice is vividly seen in the towers at Jericho excavated by John Garstang in 1930-1936 and later by Katherine Kenyon in 1952-1958. Some of the pagan nations used the walls of a city as a special place of sacrifice. In II Kgs. 3:26-27 the king of Moab offered his oldest son, who was to be his successor to the throne, as a human sacrifice on the city wall. These towers were the strongholds of the fortress-wall. See Judg. 9:50-51 and Prov. 18:10. In Neh. 3 there are numbers of references to the towers on the wall of Jerusalem.

Verse 4 speaks of dwelling "in your tent forever." The KJV and the ASV translate this as "tabernacle" rather than "tent." The word "tent" is generally thought of as a metaphor describing divine hospitality. Thus the tent becomes the dwelling place of God, symbolic of the temple as in Ps. 27:5. The shelter of his wings describes the care which a bird has for its young. See also Ps. 17:8. In verse 5 he says that God has heard his vows and has given him the blessings of a heritage with those who fear the Lord's name.

Verses 6-7 appear to be a sort of interruption since verse 8 continues the thought of verse 5. However some commentators consider it a bridge to verse 8. It is appropriate for the psalmist to insert a petition for the king as he expresses his own lament and expression of personal need. Rhodes believes this is a response of a choir or a group of worshippers. Three requests are made for the king: (a) for an extension of his life, (b) that the king's reign may never be cut off, and (c) that God's kindness and faithful care may never leave the king. Some believe that this may be the psalmist himself as he switches from third person singular construction to first person singular construction. A similar idea may occur in Ps. 63:8-11. Prayer on behalf of the king was a common practice among many ancient people.

In verse 8 the psalmist returns to the line of thought begun in verses 2-5. With the security of God's protection and hospitality the poet will be free to sing God's praises and fulfill his vows day by day.

Psalms 63

Introduction and Summary

The theme and character of this psalm shares common ground with the theme and character of Ps. 61. Both are prayers of praise and both affirm the psalmist's thirst and need for God's protection. Both psalms also include a petition for the king. In each the writer himself may be the king being spoken in the third person singular while the bulk of the psalm is in the first person singular. This has led some commentators to conclude that Ps. 61 and Ps. 63 came from a single author under identical circumstances.

Most commentators speak highly of the poetic beauty of this psalm, ranking it among the very best in the entire collection. Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) is quoted as saying, "It was decreed and ordained by the primitive fathers that no day should pass without the public singing of the Psalm. . . The spirit and soul of the whole book of Psalms is contracted into this Psalm." (Quoted by Perowne, *op. cit.*, p. 486.) There is no petition in the psalm. The poet does not ask for either temporal or spiritual favors. Instead it is filled with gladness, praise, exaltation, communion with God, and a longing for his presence.

The superscription attributes this psalm to David during the time he was in the Judean desert possibly referring to the time when he was fleeing from Saul. (See II Sam. 25-27 and 28-29). Mays believes that this superscription was based on verse 1 where the writer speaks of being in a "dry and weary land where there is no water." (Mays, *op. cit.* p. 218.) If, however the king being spoken of is David, some commentators believe that it is more likely that the Psalm was written at the time that David was fleeing from Absalom rather than from Saul. Rhodes believes that the reference to dry land and a lack of water is a symbolic expression describing the psalmist's feeling of his deep need for the presence of God.

The psalm divides itself into two main sections. Verses 1-8 extol the presence, love, and protection of the Lord and verses 9-11 express the psalmist's confidence that God will protect him from his enemies and the silencing of the lying lips of those who oppose him.

Commentary

The psalm begins with the poet expressing his earnestness in seeking God. Throughout the poem he will continue to make this proclamation. In the synonymous parallelism of verse 1 the word "soul" is used first and then the word "flesh" (also translated "body") is used. In the LXX the word ψυχη (*psuchē*) is used first, generally translated "soul" referring to the life or the whole person. Then the word σαρξ (*sarx*) "flesh" is used as the psalmist makes his parallel statement. Most English translations use "flesh" but the NIV uses "body." Linguists say that the Hebrew word can be translated either "body" or "flesh." The message is that his whole being is seeking the Lord as a thirsty person would search for water. His thoughts, desires, affections, and feelings are centered on God, the one true object of his worship. He begins by saying, "You are my God" but this is not simply a poetic statement. The entire poem is a proclamation of his devotion.

As previously mentioned, the poet's expression, "In a dry and weary land where there is no water" is taken by some to be a literal statement of his location in the Judean desert. Many scholars see this as a figurative statement of the psalmist's spiritual thirst somewhat like the opening of Ps. 42:1, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you O God." It may be that he is removed from the temple (sanctuary) and longs for the beauty and solace of God's presence.

Verse 2 shows that he has experienced the power and glory of the Lord in the sanctuary, and is overcome with the thought of God's majesty. At the time of the building of the Tabernacle at Mt. Sinai God said, "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" Ex. 25:8. At the dedication of the temple the Lord said to Solomon, "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever," I Kings 9:3.

In verses 2-3 the psalmist speaks of three attributes of God. He is a God of power and glory. He is a God of steadfast love. The psalmist's worship is so profound that he says, "Your love is better than life." Some translations say, "Your loving kindness" while others express it as "your steadfast love." The original language will allow any of these. The LXX uses the word ελεος (*eleos*) which means mercy, pity, or compassion. Mounce describes the meaning of the original Hebrew word by saying that it is "one of the richest, most theologically insightful terms in the Old Testament. It denotes 'kindness, love, loyalty, mercy,' most poignantly employed in the context of relationship between God and humans as well as between one human and another – the former relationship using the word three times as often as the later." (William D. Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), p. 426.) The psalmist considers the love and compassion of the Lord to be more valuable to him than life itself. Long life is sometimes considered evidence of God's love, but this poet sees God's love more valuable even than this. Compare Ps. 73:25-28. He is given the richest of foods. In the poet's mind this is a symbolic statement of the food for his soul which comes from the covenant love relationship provided by the Lord. It sustains him spiritually just as physical food sustains him physically. There is a triple parallelism relating to the psalmist's devoted desire to praise God. In verse 3 he says, "My lips will glorify you" and in verse 4 he says, "I will praise you as long as I live." Then in verse 5 he says, "With singing lips my mouth will praise you."

Verses 6-7 show that even when the poet goes to bed he does not forget his Lord's protection and love. "I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help I sing in the shadow of your wings." Rhodes and some others believe the wings being spoken of here and in Ps. 61:4 are the wings of the cherubim in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. This does not seem to be warranted however since the psalmist is speaking of a spiritual and personal relationship with God rather than a physical symbol in the Temple. God's provision of safety and protection symbolized by his sheltering wings is anoth`er reason that some commentators believe that Ps. 63 and Ps. 61 were written by the same person. See Ps. 61:4. In verse 8 the poet speaks again of the sustaining hand of God, using the word "soul" to describe his whole being in the same way as in verse 1.

Verses 9-11 constitute the second section of the psalm. Suddenly the mood of the psalm changes

and the psalmist says that those who would destroy his life will go down in the depths of the earth, destroyed by the sword, and become food for the animals. This appears to be out of character for the psalmist who has been praising God and is so deeply spiritual and grateful. However this kind of change in mood is not unknown in the Psalms. For example Ps. 5 is a psalm extolling the Lord for his power and love of good and abhorrence of evil. Then in verses 9-10 of that psalm there is a similar change of tone as we see in Ps. 63:9-10. We must remember that Israel generally considered the enemies of their nation as enemies of God. Therefore to call for their punishment would not be considered an unworthy thought. When the poet begins the conclusion of his poem he says, "The king will rejoice in God," probably speaking of himself as the king. It would not have been unusual either among the Hebrews or the pagan poets to speak of themselves in both the first person and in the third person as noted in Psalm 61. (For more information, see Commentary on Ps. 61.) The psalmist portrays his enemies in sharp contrast with himself – "*but* they" – that is those who seek to prevail through lies will be silenced.

Psalms 64

Introduction and Summary

This short psalm is a plea to the Lord to remove the evil doers who are pursuing the psalmist. It is therefore in the category of Individual Laments. We have no information concerning the situation of the psalmist or those who threaten him. The psalmist depends on God to know all of the details of his needs. He uses a series of metaphors from those who hunt wild animals to describe the tactics of his enemies, and he appeals to the Lord to "shoot them with arrows." He is confident that God will do so. The slanderous threats of his enemies will be turned against them and all of their weapons will be met effectively by the arrows of God. The result will be that "all mankind will fear" and they will proclaim the works of God. The righteous will rejoice and the upright will praise the Lord.

In the superscription the psalm is attributed to David, and certain similarities to Ps. 7 have caused some scholars to conclude that both are properly attributed to David. Perowne believes that in spite of some technical difficulties between this Psalm and Psalms 64, both might be correctly ascribed to David. (Perowne, *op.cit.* p. 493.) Other commentators such as William R. Taylor have rejected this claim, assigning it to a post-exilic period. (Taylor, *op. cit.,* pp. 333-334.) There is almost no information in the psalm itself which would lead us to date it at any particular time.

Excluding the introduction (verses 1-2) and conclusion (verses 9-10), the psalm divides itself into two brief sections. Verses 3-6 give the psalmist's plight and vividly describe his distress as he is pursued by his enemies. Verses 7-8 describe his confidence that God will ultimately deliver him and destroy his enemies. The conclusion in verses 9-10 says that this will result in the righteous and upright of the land rejoicing and praising the Lord.

Commentary

Verses 1-2 introduce the psalmist's cry. In psalms of individual lament this is a customary type of introduction. In most English translations verses 1-2 have the psalmist introducing his peril by asking God to hear his voice, "in my complaint" as he seeks divine protection and preservation from his enemies. He categorizes them as "wicked" and "evil doers." They secretly plot (conspire) against him, and he fears for his safety. Therefore he appeals to the Lord to hide him from their secret plots. In various translations these conspiracies (secret plots) are described as "insurrection of workers of iniquity" (KJV), "tumult of the workers of iniquity," (ASV), "scheming of evildoers" (RSV), or "noisy crowd of evildoers" (NIV). The variety of translations helps to show the latitude of this expression in verse 2.

In verses 3-6 the psalmist describes his enemies' tactics and the dangers the poet faces from them. He first speaks of their violent words describing them as tongues which are as sharp as swords. Their abusive words of slander and defamation are designed to wound him as if arrows and swords were used against him. Verses 5-6 tell how these enemies encourage and help one another as they lay their plans against the psalmist. The attacks of the evil-doers are well thought

out and planned and no one will see them carry out their evil deeds. This is a well-planned conspiracy against the psalmist. It is planned as a perfect crime.

At this point, verse 6c, the psalmist makes an important observation which Marvin E. Tate calls "the pivotal expression in the psalm." This verse says, "Surely the mind and heart of man is cunning." (Tate, *op. cit.*, on CD).

Verses 7-8 form the second section in which the psalmist expresses his confidence that God will protect him and deliver him from his oppressors. This will ultimately result in the destruction of the enemies. The expression "God will shoot them with arrows" (vs. 7a) appears to counteract the attacks of the enemies described in verse 4, "They shoot at him suddenly without fear." No doubt this contrast is designed to show that God is a "greater archer" than his enemies. It is important to notice that the psalmist is depending on God to avenge him. The psalmist follows the same structure in verse 8 saying that their abusive speech will be overcome when the Lord turns their own words against them, bringing them to ruin. "All who see them will shake their heads in scorn," referring to God's demonstration of power and justice. These expressions are symbolic and do not describe the nature of the literal retribution to be brought on the enemies. In colloquial terms the psalmist is saying, "The Lord will give them a dose of their own medicine."

In the conclusion, verses 9-10, the psalmist makes a spiritual application of these events. He combines the facts for "all mankind" to fear and ponder as they proclaim God's works. He also exhorts the righteous to rejoice in the Lord, and finally expresses confidence that God will provide refuge for the upright of heart as they offer their praise to the Lord.

As a whole, the psalm combines complaint, judgment, and rejoicing in God's action. The profound wickedness of evil-doers is vividly described as the psalmist speaks of the cunning character of men's minds and hearts in verse 6b. Some commentators have made a broad application of this to defend the depraved nature of all mankind. However it appears that the psalmist is referring particularly to the minds and hearts of his enemies who are planning their evil deeds against him rather than speaking of the depravity of all mankind. In contrast to this verse 10 speaks of the minds and hearts of the righteous as they react quite differently from the enemies he has been describing.

Marvin Tate expresses a practical application of some of the principles involved in this psalm. "The psalm is, however, finally an affirmation of faith in the judgment and saving power of Yahweh. . . There can be correspondence between sin and judgment. Those who shoot arrows (vs. 4) may be shot by God (vs. 7); those who whet their tongues like swords (vs. 3) may find them turned against themselves (vs., 8); the judgment upon those who encourage one another in evil matters in secret [counsels] (verses 2, 5) can result in God-fearers who will declare the word of God. Glory and security may belong to the righteous (verse 10). The psalm seems to express confidence in the judgment of God, but not certainty. It asks for faith." (Tate, *op. cit.* on CD) It is interesting to compare the teaching of this psalm with the New Testament teaching in Matt. 6:25-34, Phil 4:8-13, and Rom. 8:26-39.

Psalms 70

Introduction and Summary

Psalms 70 is identical to Ps. 40:14-17 with a few small and insignificant variations. Commentators are divided concerning the reason for this and the relationship between the two psalms. Some of their conclusions and observations are given below.

Psalms 40 and 70 are both psalms of individual lament but some commentators emphasize the liturgical character of Ps. 40 in contrast to Ps. 70. Consequently they believe that Ps. 70 was lifted out of Ps. 40:14-17 and given a separate existence. Ps. 70 was not considered liturgical but became a popular psalm. Some believe that one of the conclusions of this hypothesis could be that Ps. 70 was written during the period of the divided monarchy since it describes the Lord's dissatisfaction with empty sacrifices for sin, a topic familiar in many of the Minor Prophets. The conclusion of this is that the events of the Exile and the Restoration of the Jews are not appropriately described in Ps. 40:6-7 but 40:14-16 do apply to those periods. Therefore some conclude that Ps. 70 was taken out of Ps. 40 and given a life of its own. On the other hand, many commentators believe that this attitude toward the sacrifices was characteristic of the post-exilic period. Tate and some others believe that Ps. 70 was written first and that the writer of Ps. 40 adapted the material in Ps. 70 to suit his own purpose. Tate believes that the contents of Ps. 70 suite the purpose and mood of Ps. 40 and the writer of Ps. 40 incorporated Ps. 70 into his own work for that reason. (Tate, *op. cit.,* on CD.) Toombs considers Ps. 70 to be a traditional psalm quoted by the author of Ps. 40. (Toombs, *op. cit.,* p. 274.) Also cites Heb. 10:5-7 where Ps. 40:6-7 is quoted. James Mays also believes that the literary completeness of Ps. 70 indicates that it was written first and later incorporated into Ps. 40. However, he admits, as most other scholars do, that it is impossible to know the sequence and circumstances of the composition of these two psalms. (James L. Mays, *op. cit* p. 233.) Psalm 70 is composed almost entirely of petitions.

The superscriptions attached to both of these psalms attribute them to David, "For the director of music." There is nothing in either one to point toward any specific writer, date, or circumstance.

Commentary

Verse 1 introduces the psalm with a plea which is typical of psalms of individual lament. In every verse except the last, the psalmist uses parallelism to express his plea and to describe his enemies. Verse 1 is made up of parallel statements calling for the Lord to "hasten" to save him "quickly." We do not know the specific reason for the urgency of his petition. This urgency appears to be very important to the psalmist since he repeats it three times in the short space of five verses.

In verse 2 he uses parallelism to describe his plea for the punishment of his enemies; "May all who seek my life . . . may all who desire my ruin." This verse is also seen in contrast with verse 4. In verse 2 he asks the Lord to put to shame and confusion those who desire his ruin while in verse 4 he prays for rejoicing and gladness to be the blessings of those who seek the Lord.

In verse 3 his enemies are shown gloating over his discomfort saying "Aha, Aha." This is an ancient expression of derision and scorn. Some commentators believe that the psalmist may have been disassociated from a priestly group of which he had been a member, and now they are scorning him, speaking evil of him and trying to hurt him emotionally. There is no specific evidence of this disassociation.

The contrast of verse 4 with the earlier parts of the psalm shows the writer's dependence on God and his confidence that the Lord will deliver the godly from their perils. Verse 5 expresses the poverty and need of the psalmist. Most commentators apply this to his feeling of spiritual poverty, *i.e.* his humility rather than physical poverty. Once again he expresses the urgency of his plea before God.

Chapter IV
Psalms of Community Lament

Psalms 14

Introduction and Summary

In the previous chapter we saw how individuals who were experiencing tragedy or calamity prayed to the Lord for deliverance. As the community of Israel or other significant groups within the nation experienced such catastrophes poets gave voice to these feelings by writing psalms of community lament. The various authors tried to capture the mood and feeling of despair of the people who constituted a particular community. This was sometimes the nation as a whole and at other times the community was made up of a smaller group. In these psalms we see the hearts of the people as they reach out to the Lord and plead their cause, seeking God's divine intervention. The character and form of these psalms has caused some to think of them as wisdom psalms of individual laments rather than community laments.

Psalms 14 and 53 are almost identical in verbiage, and certainly in thought. It is probable that this duplication shows that originally the various psalms were collected into individual books prior to the time that they were brought together in their present form. We have no way of knowing how or when this compilation took place. As we look at Ps. 14:1 we must first remember that the Old Testament never presents arguments for the existence of God although the marvels of his creative power are frequently mentioned in writings such as Job, Psalms, and Isaiah. God's existence is a foregone conclusion. Even in Israel's periods of idolatry and paganism, theism vs. atheism did not seem to be a problem for the nation.

This psalm however shows us that the topic cannot be easily dismissed on that ground alone. The psalmist will show us why. Psalms 14 and 53 reveals the doom of the ungodly and the mournful reality of so much evil in the world. "There is no one who does good . . . all have turned aside, they have together become corrupt and there is no one who does good, not even one" (Ps. 14:3 and 53:3). The same basic theme is found in Ps. 12:2 which is also considered a psalm of community lament. Probably the psalmist(s) is not speaking of the outside world only but also of the nation of Israel itself. Portions of Ps. 14 and 53 are quoted in Rom. 3:9-18 where Paul not only makes a general application of this truth but also applies it to Israel in his own day. William Taylor summarizes this by saying, "It is evident that the psalm was written at a time when practical atheism had appeared in the community of Israel. The specific charge of irreligiousness grows more common in the literature of the Old Testament the closer we come to the Greek period, when through foreign influences the faith of many grew weak." (Taylor, *op. cit.* p. 277.) Taylor believes that this indicates a late post-Exilic period as the time of writing. The superscriptions attribute both Ps. 14 and 53 to David but some of the content has caused scholars and commentators to assign them to a much later period. Peter Craigie however disagrees with this stating that a pre-exilic date is likely. (Craigie, *op. cit.,* on CD.)

There are two principle problems being dealt with in this psalm. First, it may be thought by some that the "fool" is a silly stupid person who doesn't have enough intelligence to believe in God. He is truly a "fool" but this overlooks the fact that there are some highly intelligent people who do not believe in God. The second problem is the scope of unbelief. "All have turned aside." This is shown to be hyperbolic however when verse 5 speaks of the righteous, and verse 7 speaks of the salvation of Israel.

Commentary

Verses 1-6 are sometimes referred to as a "Wisdom Lament." Psalms 14 and 53 both begin with the same statement; "The fool says in his heart 'there is no God.'" Paul spoke of the philosophers of Greece in much the same way in I Cor. 1:18—2:5. They considered the gospel foolishness since it was not in line with their own logical reasoning. Things are not as they seem however. The "foolishness" of faith ultimately yields the fruit of righteousness while the "wisdom" of atheism ultimately yields the fruit of hopelessness. The "fool" of these psalms is not an unintelligent or uneducated person. He may very well be the opposite. However, he is a person whose life is without direction because he rejects the knowledge of God. From the point of view of the psalmist and covenant Israel the opposites of "fool" and "folly" are not "wise" and "wisdom." They are the rejection of the loving kindness of the supreme Sovereign of the universe. The "fool" has robbed himself of the great blessing of this Sovereign's loving kindness. The latter part of verse 1 shows the outcome of the fool's reasoning. Since he has no moral-ethical guidance outside of himself and his society, he becomes corrupt and vile and he does no good.

We should also notice that the declaration, "There is no God" is not a statement of fact, but a philosophical statement of the "faith of the unbeliever." He has no solid evidence to support his "faith" and his scientific appeals never involve empirical or eye-witness testimony. There is nothing beyond a theory or hypothesis. The affirmation, "There is no God" is therefore a statement of his philosophy or belief, not of fact. In this we have a statement of the "faith of the unbeliever."

From a contemporary practical vantage point, it is interesting to consider the number of benevolent organizations, institutions, and individual deeds of theists and their societies compared to the number of such organization, institutions, and deeds of atheists and their societies. Atheistic societies and their organizations sponsor relatively few children's homes, hospitals, homes for aged people, feeding the poor, and care facilities for the needy. Yet these are the hallmark of people who believe in a God of loving kindness.

Verses 2-4 expand this theme to include the state of society rather than the state of an isolated individual. Here the psalmist gives the theological basis for his designation of "fool." It is not a label which he has assigned but, "The Lord looks down from heaven" to observe the hearts and actions of mankind only to see that "all have turned aside and they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." Though the "fool" may be wealthy, educated, powerful, and successful, he is tragically incomplete. Therefore the Lord sees him as one who does not act with true discretion and responsibility for he has denied the very source of his existence. James views this from the perspective of "practical atheism," *i.e.* the unbelief of the atheist is that he is living "as if" there were not God.

Mays explains this in the following way:

> If people enact life in corrupt and perverse ways (vv. 1-3), do not pray to God in their need but live by preying on others (v.4) then they are denying the reality of the Lord, the God of exodus and the covenant and the prophets. . . The setting of the psalm is a society in which corruption is "eating up" the people or the Lord, and it discloses the meaning of that situation. It does not address, therefore, the phenomenon of modern atheism directly. But the 'atheism' it does uncover is more dangerous, insidious, and general because it is a reasoning that can be found, as the prophets and Jesus insisted, in the hearts of the religious as well as the secular. The psalm is not concerned with the question of whether people accept the existence of a supreme being. It is concerned with whether people acknowledge the reality of the Lord, the God of Israel, by calling on the Lord in need and seeking the Lord in the decisions of life.

(Mays, *op. cit.*, p. 82.)

A question arises concerning verses 3-4. Are they the words of God or are they the psalmist's observations? Commentators are not in agreement on this. With either conclusion however, the message remains the same. Verse 4 seems to describe the Lord's frustration with mankind as he sees such massive disbelief in the world. "Will evildoers never learn?" is the rhetorical question. It seems that they will not.

Scholars view the statements in verses 5-6 as somewhat confusing. It is generally thought that the psalmist is drawing a contrast between the theist who hopes in God and the fool who is overwhelmed with dread. The unbeliever lives in fear as a result of the folly of his unbelief. On the other hand the Lord is in the assembly of the righteous, giving them his divine assurance and peace in their relationship with their Creator. Even though the fool attempted to do ill to the believers – "frustrate the plans of the poor" – the Lord is their refuge. This leads to the poet's prayer for deliverance in verse 7. Salvation for Israel comes out of Zion, and delivers the faithful from the folly of the fool. This comes "When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people." Therefore God's faithful will rejoice and be glad.

Many scholars believe that this is an expression of the exilic community as they longed to see the restoration of Jerusalem. This would place the date of writing somewhat late. However, it could be a symbolic expression as the faithful among Israel looked for the restoration of fidelity within their own nation.

The use which Paul makes of Ps. 14 in Rom. 3:9-18 needs to be considered. Some of the Judaizers tended to identify "other people" (Gentiles) as "the fools" and themselves (Jewish Christians) as "the believers." However, Paul makes a different application. He uses this psalm to show the hopeless sinfulness of all mankind (Jews and Gentiles alike) and the absolute dependence which all mankind has on the grace of God for salvation. Justification does not come to the Israelites because of their position as God's chosen people while the Gentiles are the "fools" who do not know God. Jews and Gentiles alike are sinners of equal guilt and of equal need. In Romans Paul has shown that the world in general is guilty (chapter 1) and that the Jews

are no better than the rest of the world (chapter 2). He therefore concludes that Ps. 14:9-18 describes the situation of all mankind. The meritorious works of the "fools" (Gentiles) can never secure their justification, but neither can the meritorious works of the "believers" (Jews) secure their justification. Paul uses this psalm to show that the grace of God perfected by the atoning sacrifice of Christ is the only hope for mankind. Therefore the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all people.

Psalms 58

Introduction and Summary

There is violence on the earth and righteous people are frustrated not only by its existence, but also by the fact that sometimes God does not act with the haste which humans want or expect. However, the idea of judgment and justice is taught throughout the Bible. The Old Testament speaks of God's judgment coming to Israel in the form of withholding blessings or allowing plagues, droughts, famine, captivity, and the like. In the New Testament the topic is frequently spoken of in reference to the final judgment. Psalms 58 tells us that a just God will bring righteous judgment to the evildoers. From the perspective of those who are victimized by the corruption, immorality, and the abuse of evildoers the idea of judgment is welcome. "Justice has finally prevailed," they say.

The psalmist introduces his theme in verse 1 by asking two rhetorical questions: "Do you rulers indeed speak justly? Do you judge uprightly among men?" (NIV) Both of these questions are silently answered with an emphatic "No." Following this introduction the body of the psalm divides itself into three sections starting with a short but vivid picture of the evil character of the ruling class (verses 3-5). All their lives – even from their birth – they have been wicked. They are like snakes – cobras (adders) to be more descriptive – who will not heed their charmers. Following this pithy description, verses 6-9 give the psalmist's pictures of the prayer of the community appealing to the Lord for justice by means of adequate punishment of these wicked rulers. Verse 10 speaks of the confidence of the community that God will act and righteous people will rejoice when justice is triumphant. The psalm has a fitting conclusion just as it has a fitting introduction. God brings justice to the earth, verse 11. With this conclusion, the righteous can live in hope.

The psalm is ascribed to David, but it does not specify any occasion for its writing. The idea of "lesser divine beings" in the "heavenly court" (see Commentary below) was a thought which came in later Judaism. Scholars who hold to this interpretation of this psalm therefore assign it to a very late period of Judaism. There is nothing in the psalm itself which provides evidence of its author or time period.

Commentary

Verse 1 asks, "Do you rulers indeed speak justly?" (NIV) The Hebrew word for "rulers" has a variety of meanings and is treated in various ways in different English translations. In the KJV it is translated "congregation," in the ASV it is translated "in silence," and in the NAS, RSV, and the NRSV it is translated "gods." Arnold B. Rhodes believes that the psalm probably describes a period of moral anarchy in Israel during which the people ultimately declare that God's justice will prevail over their evil rulers.

The question is, "To whom does the word 'rulers' (NIV) refer? Are they the physical judges and rulers of Israel or are they 'lesser divine beings' who are reprimanded by God?" Roland Murphy says that the Hebrew language in verse 1 indicates that those being addressed are heavenly

rulers such as angels or other divine beings "who are not living up to their responsibilities for the maintenance of justice on the earth." (Murphy, *op. cit.* p. 102.) Also see Rhodes, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94 and Craigie, *op. cit.,* on CD. James Mays says:

> The identity of those addressed by the vocative in verse 1 is a perennial question, because the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. If 'your gods' is correct (so NRSV), then the psalm addresses the minor deities of the ancient Near Eastern pantheon who were thought of as intermediate officials in the divine administration of the world. . . . The wicked would be the human instruments of their injustice. It seems better to translate 'O mighty ones' (NJPS) [New Jewish Publication Society Version] or 'you rulers.'"

Mays, *op. cit.,* pp. 211-212.

William Taylor takes a strongly liberal position. "The Old Testament religion never became so thoroughly monotheistic that it did not allow for the existence of divine beings subordinate to Yahweh. Since from early times in Israel the gods of the nations were thought to be existent, it was not unnatural that the people of Israel, instead of denying the existence of these gods, reduced them to the level of servants of Yahweh (cf. 86:8, 95:3, 97:7)." (Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 302.) Taylor's position is very speculative and he is misinterpreting the additional passages he cites (Ps. 86:8, 95:3, 97:7). It is interesting to compare the language of Ps. 82 where God is pictured as being in a "great assembly among the gods." This is highly symbolic language employing poetic license and hyperbole and must not be taken literally. Ps. 82:6 is used by Christ in Jn. 10:31-35. Mays, in the quotation above, has the preferable view of these verses.

There can be no doubt that lesser "divine" beings are mentioned in the Bible as servants of God. "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14). Murphy's conclusion that the gods of the various nations were part of the "heavenly court" takes the idea too far. In Job 1 Satan appears before God, and elsewhere the Bible speaks of angels – both good and evil. However, nothing is said about their "position in the heavenly court" and nowhere are they assigned a role in regulating the behavior of mankind or given that kind of duty. Murphy's statement that some of these heavenly beings were "not living up to their responsibilities for the maintenance of justice on the earth" is far removed from Biblical teaching. This position diminishes the justice and sovereignty of God and contradicts the monotheistic position stated so strongly in the prophetic writings.

Verses 3-5 give a vivid but symbolic description of the evil of these rulers. They are the human tools of evil described as sinful from their birth and as dangerous as snakes. The word "cobra" is used in the NASV and the NIV English versions but "adder" is used in most other English versions. The word is broad and scholars do not believe it refers to a particular species of snake but that it is a general word used to refer to a venomous snake of any kind. Snake charmers were part of eastern culture from ancient times (Jer. 8:17 and Eccl. 10:11), and this continues into the present. In this psalm the snakes have stopped up their ears so they do not hear the tunes of the charmers. They are incorrigible even in the face of threats and judgments.

Verses 6-9 make up the prayer of the community as they ask the Lord to punish the evil rulers. The psalmist pictures their seven-fold punishment: (1) break their teeth, (2) tear out their fangs,

(3) let them vanish like water that flows away, (4) let their arrows be blunt, (5) let them be like a slug (snail) which melts as it moves away, (6) let them be like a still-born child which never sees the sun, and (7) let them be blown away by the wind like a thorn bush under a cooking pot. Each of these figures carries the picture of diminishing strength or power.

Verse 10 speaks of the joy of the righteous as they see the defeat of injustice and the triumph of God. Not only are the ruthless rulers destroyed while the community feels a sense of relief, but there is a note of vengeance present in verse 10. The poet says the righteous will "bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked." Also, "The righteous will be glad when they are avenged." Here we have an interesting phenomenon as is also seen in Ps. 137:8-9. There the psalmist pronounces happiness on the one who dashes the babies of Babylon against the stones in repayment for what Babylon has done against the people of Judah. In our introductory chapter we mentioned that some of the psalms portray "men speaking to God." Ps. 58 and 137 are good examples of this. We must remember that in the Psalms we have men expressing their innermost thoughts to the Lord – whether for good or for vengeance – in ways which we seldom see anywhere else in holy writ. A good number of the psalms fit this form. The writers were not opposed to expressing anger, retaliation, or vengeance toward an enemy. These are honest expressions presented by the psalmists.

Verse 11 gives the result of this. The community of Israel will see the proof that the Lord will reward the righteous and bring judgment to the earth. This will show that God is just and brings hope to his people. In a sense this psalm addresses the problem of suffering although the psalmist does not discuss nor answer the problem. It is only introduced and then the community expresses its confident conclusion that God will act justly.

Psalms 83

Introduction and Summary

This psalm of community lament describes a massive conspiracy of ten nations which constitute a serious threat to Israel's existence. The whole community of God's people is pictured in their petition to the Lord for his protection against their enemies. In the past God has brought victory to Israel as exemplified in the destruction or defeat of the seven nations mentioned by the psalmist. Now, with the present threat, the community calls upon the Lord to defend it once again for its enemies are seeking to obliterate God's chosen nation. Therefore, "O God, do not keep silent; be not quiet O God, be not still." (Ps. 83:1)

Israel's Biblical history does not tell us of any such conspiracy or threat involving so many of the surrounding nations. In II Chron. 20:1-37 we are told of a conspiracy of nations which attack Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, but that group of nations was not as formidable as those described in Ps. 83. In Neh. 4:7-8 Nehemiah was told of nearby nations which were a threat to the Jews returning from the Exile as they attempted to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Later, during the Maccabean period a conspiracy of nations formed an organized threat against the Jews. Judas Maccabeus and his armies had recaptured a portion of Jerusalem and had rebuilt the altar and rededicated the sanctuary. When the Gentile nations heard about this they attacked, but were defeated by Judas and his army. Even though this was considered a spectacular event during the Intertestamental Period, it does not appear to measure up to the description in Psalms 83. We must therefore conclude that there is no information in the psalm itself which helps us give a definite date to its composition. Probably the poet is simply looking around and sees that Israel is surrounded by hostile nations. He is not speaking of a current coalition of these nations but simply recognizing the threat that such surroundings suggest.

There is one possible limitation however in verse 8 where the poet adds Assyria to the list. This may indicate that at the time of this threat Assyria had not risen to the empire status of later years. Instead, it was simply another nation, probably strong but not dominating, which lent strength to the coalition. From the time of Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-11) we do not hear of Assyria again until the time of Menahem, king of Israel (745-736 B.C.) when Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.) invaded the northern kingdom. At that time Menahem gave him a thousand talents of silver to buy him off and get him to leave the country. Fourteen years later the kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians under the kingship of Shalmaneser V (724-722 B.C.) and Sargon II (722-705 B.C.). The Assyrian Empire fell to the Babylonians in 612 B.C. Some believe that this probably places the composition of the psalm prior to Assyria's rise to empire status, but we do not know that exact time period. Marvin Tate is a good representative of those who believe that a post-exilic time best suites the context but he admits that there is no solid information driving that conclusion. (Tate, *op. cit.* on CD.)

The superscription assigns this psalm to Asaph, and I Chron. 6:31-39 mentions such a person during the time of David and probably Solomon. He and his descendants are mentioned frequently in the family trees in I and II Chronicles. Once again we need to remember that the superscriptions are not part of the Biblical text itself and they may not contain accurate information.

As is the case in many of the psalms of community lament, following the introduction in verse 1 the psalm divides itself into two basic sections. First there is the description of the emergency, *i.e.* the conspiracy of the hostile surrounding nations verses 2-8, followed by an appeal to the Lord to protect Israel by destroying its enemies as he has done in the past (verses 9-17). In this section he brings up various encounters between Israel and its neighbors some of which are recorded in Old Testament history while others are not. As the psalmist develops this portion of his poem he perceives Israel's problem to be rooted in the evil nations which oppose God's people but he says nothing about the evil in Israel itself. This is similar to many other psalms of community (national) laments in which there is no call for Israel's repentance although we see a strong demanded from the prophets for the entire nation to turn back to God. Finally the psalm is completed with a one verse conclusion stating how this action on God's part will result in great glory and honor coming to the Lord (verse 18).

Commentary

Verse 1 uses parallelism to introduce the theme of the psalm. It is an appeal to the Lord not to keep silent, be quiet, or be still. The introduction seems to show a bit of frustration in the mind of the psalmist, perhaps thinking as Habakkuk thought, that God is not as actively involved in destroying evil as the psalmist or the prophet thought he should be. The writer feels that he must urge the Lord not to be passive in light of the present threats against the nation. The New Jewish Version translates this, "do not hold aloof" which in English is quite descriptive of the need for active help from God.

Verses 2-8 describe the poet's perception of the enemy threats, enumerating the nations involved and the particular dangers which Israel is facing from each of them. The expression, "your foes rear their heads" or "those who hate you have lifted up their heads" shows the arrogance of those nations against the God of Israel. Since pagan nations linked their gods to their nation's identity and its military might, the defeat of a nation was also considered the defeat of the gods of the conquered nation. This is certainly part of the psalmist's thinking when he speaks of the arrogance of the nations. Israel's enemies create an uproar or a tumult as they plan their conspiracies against God's people, *i.e.* "those you cherish" or "your treasured ones" (verse 3). This may also be translated "your hidden ones," or "your protected ones." The idea of God's covenant relationship with Israel may be in the mind of the psalmist since he pictures the community appealing to God on the basis of the Lord's love for his people. In some ways the statement of verse 3, "they plot against those you cherish," may be thought of as an arrogant statement coming from the psalmist since the history of Israel has not been characterized by their fidelity to the covenant. Yet they call on the Lord to fulfill his promise to his "treasured people."

In verse 3 when describing the conspirators he speaks of their crafty plans to destroy Israel. The word "crafty" can also be translated "shrewd or cunning." God is "reminded" of his "obligation" to defend his covenant people. In verse 4 the poet begins to enumerate both present and past atrocities of enemy nations and their plans to completely annihilate Israel. They want to "destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more." The enemies appear to be confident that their plans will succeed and Israel will be no more. Their complaint makes it clear that they consider a conspiracy against Israel to be a conspiracy against God himself – "With one

mind they plot together; they form an alliance against you" (verse 5). In verse 2 the psalmist described the feelings of God's enemies. They are "those who hate you," or they are "your foes."

In verse 6 the psalmist begins listing the ten nations which are parties to this conspiracy. They are: Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab, the Hagrites, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, Tyre, and Assyria. The Edomites occupied the land south of the Dead Sea and the Ishmaelites were primarily Bedouins who occupied the area south of Palestine between Egypt and the Persian Gulf. See Gen. 25:18. This land was also occupied at times by the Amalekites. Moab was on the east side of the Dead Sea, the Hagrites lived east of Gilead and north of Ammon. Gebal was located south of the Dead Sea near Petra, Ammon was on the east side of the Jordan just north of Moab, and Amalek was probably a group of Bedouin tribes living in the Negeb region of southern Palestine. Philistia was made up primarily of five major cities, Gaza, Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gath, near the southern coast of Palestine between Gaza and Joppa. Tyre was a city of the Phoenicians located on the northern coast of Palestine (modern day Lebanon), and Assyria was part of Mesopotamia located north of Babylon. For more complete descriptions and locations see a Bible Dictionary. Verse 8 speaks of Assyria in a little different way saying, "Even Assyria has joined them to lend strength [an arm] to the descendants of Lot." The expression, "the descendants of Lot" refers to Ammon and Moab, both of which sprung from the incestuous relationship which Lot had with his daughters after the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 19:30-38). Geographically these ten nations completely surrounded Israel and it is easy to understand the peril felt by the community especially in light of the statements in verses 4-5.

In verses 9-17 the psalmist reviews certain great victories the Lord has brought to Israel through his intervention. Four of these outstanding victories are recalled. First there is the story of Gideon and the defeat of the Midianites. This involved an interesting series of events resulting in the reduction of Gideon's army from thirty-two thousand to three hundred. The reason for this drastic reduction was so the Israelites would not take personal credit for the victory. Instead, it was the victory of the Lord through his intervention. The strategy and its outcome are described in Judges 7:1-25.

The second battle involved an earlier military encounter with the Canaanites found in Judges 4-5. Because of Israel's sins, they became the servants of Jabin, a Canaanite king who reigned in Hazor. His commander was Sisera. Deborah, who is called a prophetess, was leading Israel at the time, and she was holding court at an unnamed location described as "under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel." She sent for Barak and told him that the Lord was commanding him to lead an army against Sisera. Barak said he would go but only if Deborah would go with him. When Sisera was told of the plan he mustered his army, including nine hundred chariots of iron. The armies met at Mt. Tabor about fifteen miles (24.14 km.) southwest of the Sea of Galilee. As Barak and his army of ten thousand men went down Mt. Tabor, the Lord routed Sisera's army. Sisera abandoned his own chariot and fled on foot. Jael, a supposed friend of Sisera invited him to come into her tent and hide there. She placed a cover over him and while he slept she drove a tent peg into his head killing him. "On that day God subdued Jabin, the Canaanite king before the Israelites." Judges 4:22-24. Although Ps. 83:10 mentions Endor as the place where Jabin apparently died we have no information on this in the historical account in Judges. It only says Jabin was destroyed. The battle took place at Mt. Tabor and Endor was located about 5 miles (8 km.) southwest of the mountain.

In Ps. 83:11 we are briefly introduced to Oreb and Zeeb, two leaders (nobles) of the Midianites. In Judges 7:25 and 8:3 we see that they were captured and killed. Next the psalmist mentions Zebah and Zalmunna who were "the kings of Midian." Gideon also killed them as recorded in Judges 8:1-21.

Having mentioned these God-given victories, the community petitions God to make the present conspirators like tumbleweed and chaff (vs.13). In verses 14-15 the poet uses parallelism to emphasize his point by requesting God to punish the conspiring nations as fire in a forest or as a flame sets a mountain ablaze and to pursue them with tempest and storm. Finally God is petitioned to "Cover their faces with shame so that men will seek your name O Lord" (vs. 16). Verse 17 continues this theme by saying, "May they ever be ashamed and dismayed; may they perish in disgrace."

Verse 18 concludes the psalm with the statement, "Let them know that you, whose name is the Lord – that you alone are the Most High over all the earth." Some commentators consider this statement to be is the psalmist's attempt to balance his cruel condemnations found in verses 9-15 where he is merciless in his petition for the destruction of all of the conspirators. On the other hand this is not unusual in the psalms of community lament as well as some other categories. See Ps. 53, 58, 79, 94, and 137.

Psalms 85

Introduction and Summary

This psalm is difficult to categorize. It has some of the characteristics and structure of a community lament but some scholars believe that it also has a prophetic liturgical character. In that case it is presumed that portions of the psalm were to be sung by a priest with other portions forming a response from the congregation or a choir. Marvin Tate objects to this saying, "The speaker may be understood as a prophet or priest, who hears the message of Yahweh in verse 9, but the postulate of a change of speakers is built on general theories rather than on the content of the psalm." (Tate, *op. cit.* on CD.)

The psalms of community laments usually involve the citation of the evils of Israel's enemies but this psalm has none of those sentiments. There are three major ideas in the psalm; gratitude for the Lord's care in the past, the people's request for God's revival of the nation, and their confidence that in the future God will continue to intervene on their behalf.

Portions of the psalm are confusing and appear to be conflicting. It begins with acknowledgment and gratitude for God's mercy and love, but about half way through (verses 4-7) there are the requests for restoration, the removal of God's anger, and the need for his unfailing love and salvation. Both the poet and the community are experiencing mixed emotions. There is the deepest expression of gratitude that God has removed his anger and has replaced it with his mercy and love. At the same time, however, there is a profound plea for the Lord to grant those very things to his people, seemingly because his anger is still present. Compare verses 1-3 with verses 5-7.

Stewart McCullough and many other commentators consider the psalm to have three divisions. Verses 1-3 refer to the Lord's past mercies, verses 4-7 are the community's plea that the Lord should again save his people, and verses 8-13 express the confidence of the community that the Lord will deliver his people. (McCullough, *op. cit.,* pp. 457-458.) However, J. Stewart Perowne and some others divide it into only two basic divisions. Verses 1-7 express gratitude for the Lord's past care for his people. This may be a prayer coming from the people themselves or the prayer of the psalmist as he prays in behalf of the people. Verses 8-13 constitute the assurances of God's continued blessings on his people. Some believe that the first portion was to be sung by the congregation of Israel and the second section by a priest. (Perowne, vol. II, *op. cit.,* pp. 123-124.) The three divisions of the psalm appear to be more workable. The use of the psalm by the Israelite community has been the subject of much speculation.

The date of its composition presents some interesting factors. The psalm clearly demonstrates that there are some things for which the community can be thankful – God has forgiven his people and he has set aside his wrath and his fierce anger (verses 2-3) – but there are also some urgent needs both spiritual and material. Although the congregation has expressed its gratitude that God has turned his anger away, in the parallelism of verse 5 the psalmist appears to express the opposite sentiment. Two questions are presented: "Will you be angry with us forever?" and "Will you prolong your anger through all generations?" The apparent contradiction will be dealt

with in the Commentary section below. Verse 12 brings the agricultural problem into the picture showing that the psalm was probably written at a time when the people were undergoing drought and crop failure.

Various commentators believe that the psalm comes out of period when some of the exiles were returning from Babylon, during the sixth century B.C. The expression in the psalm, "You have restored the fortunes of Jacob" (85:1, NIV) is thought to confirm a post-exilic date for the psalm. In many other English versions this is translated, "Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob" or "You restored the captivity of Jacob." Similar expressions are used in the prophets to predict the return of the Jews from exile although this ought not to be thought of as a universal application. See Jer. 29:14, 30:3, 30:18, 48:47, Hos. 6:11, Joel 3:1, and Am. 9:14. The situation in Ps. 85 is also thought to reflect the economic conditions described in Hag. 1:6-11 and 2:5-19 which would date the psalm about 538 B.C. This is the time when Zerubbabel and a group of exiles were returning to Jerusalem. The people should have rebuilt the temple but they said, "The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built." (Hag. 1:2). Haggai chides them for having built "paneled houses" for themselves yet had not found time to rebuild the Lord's house. He then reminds them that this is the reason the Lord has withheld agricultural and business prosperity. See Hag. 1:9-11 and 2:9-17. In spite of this they had been blessed by being able to return from Babylon to rebuild their own country.

Other scholars however object to this saying that there is not enough evidence of the specific economic situation to conclude that this downturn is what is being referred to by the psalmist. Various economic and religious circumstances may also be considered valid for a date of authorship. Some scholars argue that this psalm was written for a New Year's celebration. The restoration of the "fortunes of Jacob" would then refers to a petition for God's blessings in the coming year. The post-exilic date however seems to be preferable.

Some have considered the latter part of this psalm, verses 7-12, to be Messianic. Roman Catholics and many Protestants read it during Advent, Nov. 27th – Dec. 24th. The original readers would certainly not have thought of it in that way but would have considered it a reflection of their own current state of affairs. Later readers supposedly saw in the psalm "hidden predictions" or "double meanings." This is supposedly seen in such statements as "he promises peace to his people," verse 8, which is considered to be fulfilled in the birth narrative statement of Lk. 2:14, "peace on earth, good will to men." Another such "hidden prediction" is supposedly found in verse 9, "surely his salvation is near," compared with Lk. 2:30 where Simeon says, "my eyes have seen your salvation." A third "hidden prediction" is found in verse 10 which is supposedly a rather general description of the Messianic age: "righteousness and peace kiss each other." When using such passages as these as "prophetic predictions," readers are projecting into the text a large measure of their own preconceived ideas rather than taking an objective look at the text and context to discover its meaning to the original readers. In exegesis we must allow the background, text, and context to speak for themselves. Otherwise our *ex*egesis (extracting knowledge *from* the text) becomes *eis*egesis (injecting our own knowledge *into* the text).

Commentary

Verses 1-3 are Israel's prayer of thanks for what the Lord has done in the past – his past mercies. However, the psalmist is not speaking of God's continual care for his people throughout their history but he has specific things in mind. The psalmist says that God has restored the fortunes of Jacob by bringing the exiles back to their homeland or through some other spectacular event. God has therefore blessed their homeland.

Let's look at some of the words in verses 1-2 as they appear in the LXX, the (Greek) Septuagint Version of the Old Testament. The expression "you showed favor" is a form of the Greek word ευδοκεω (*eudokeō*) which means "to take delight in or find pleasure in." It is in the aorist tense which indicates that this is a specific act at a specific time rather than a continuing act of taking pleasure or delight. Consequently, the meaning is that the Lord took pleasure in a particular act which he performed at a particular time. This is different than the use of the Greek imperfect tense which would be translated "you continually showed your delight to your land."

The word αποστρεφω (*apostrpheō*) means "to restore, turn back, turn away or remove." It is translated "restored," and it is also in the aorist tense, where the poet says that the Lord "*restored* the fortunes of Jacob." Again, this is referring to a specific act at a particular time in contrast to the Greek imperfect tense which would be translated, "you continually restored the fortunes of Jacob." In both of these words the Greek tense shows that the psalmist has something specific in mind perhaps referring to the return of the exiles or a similar specific event rather that speaking of God's continual care for his people throughout their past history. In verse 2 the word αφιημι (*aphiēmi*) is used. It means "to send away or dismiss" and can also be translated "to forgive." It also is in the aorist tense, indicating the specific act of forgiving the sins of the people, not the idea of continual forgiveness throughout their past. Their sins had been "sent away" by the Lord. The word καλυπτω (*kaluptō*) appears in verse 2 where the psalmist says the Lord "*covered* all their sins." Once again this is in the aorist tense.

In verse 2, when speaking of their transgressions and sins, the psalmist uses two different words in this parallelism. First he speaks of the ανομια (*anomia*) of the people. This word means "without law or lawlessness, iniquity, or sin." The basic idea of the word is to act outside of the law or without consideration for the law. Therefore such acts are "lawlessness." This is translated "iniquity" in verse 2. In that same verse, when he speaks of their "sins" being covered he uses the word αμαρτια (*hamartia*) which is the word most frequently translated "sin." It comes from the idea of missing a target or missing the mark. Compare Ps. 32:1-2 where similar expressions occur.

In verse 3 the community expresses its gratitude that the Lord has set aside his wrath and turned away from his fierce anger. In the LXX the word καταπαυω (*katapauō*) is used in this verse and is translated "set aside," "withdrawn," or "taken away" in various English versions. It is in the aorist tense which helps explain its seeming conflict with verse 5. In verse 3 the psalmist speaks of a single punctiliar action of God, possibly the setting aside of his anger when the exiles were allowed to return to the land. The Lord accomplished this though his intervention, calling Cyrus "my shepherd" and "his anointed" in Is. 44:28 and 45:1. The Jews learned some lessons

about the futility of their infidelity. After the exile God turned is anger away and provided for their restoration to the Land.

Verses 4-7 form the next section in which the community appeals to the Lord to fulfill their present needs. Verse 4-6 state this both positively and negatively. First, they ask God to restore them. Then, in form of three questions, they ask, "Will you be angry with us forever?" "Will you prolong your anger?" and "Will you not revive us again?" This seems to be a parallelism in three parts rather than the customary two parts. If the dating of this psalm is post-exilic, this could refer to the disappointment of the community that things are not as favorable as thought they had been led to expect. See Is. 40-66 for various interesting descriptions of the "coming days," along with Hab. 1:6-11, 2:15-19, and Zech. 1:12-17 which speaks of the hardships of the returnees and their complaints to the Lord. With this in mind the returnees plead for restoration and revival, considering the conditions of hardship and lack of production as evidence of the Lord's continued anger. On the other hand they are also faced with the fact that the Lord's anger was set aside when he provided for their return to the Land. The mixed feelings of the community are evident in this strange seemingly contradictory situation. We might observe however that this is a common circumstance for all mankind as we look at the sovereign God's intervention in the affairs of men both ancient and contemporary.

In verse 7 the community makes a forthright request of the Lord to "Show us your unfailing love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation." The expression "your salvation," along with the general character of verses 7-12, has caused some to classify these verses as a Messianic expectation. However, there is no contextual evidence which would drive us to that conclusion and the original readers would certainly not have considered it as such. Instead it is the simple plea for mercy and a pledge of fidelity which is found in many other psalms. In verse 8 the acknowledgement of peace coming from God is coupled with the pledge that his people will not turn back to the folly of past years. The expression of God's salvation coming near is frequently found in other psalms (about sixty-five times) and in the prophets as well (about thirty-seven times, twenty-eight of which are in Isaiah). The salvation which had come to the returning Jews was certainly seen as their release from Babylonian bondage and restoration to the Land. We must remember that the doctrine of "eternal salvation" was not prominent in Jewish Old Testament thought. The psalmist is expressing the thoughts and feelings of the Jewish congregation.

Verse 10 forms an unusual but vivid picture of the linking of righteousness and peace as the psalmist speaks of these two grand principles kissing each other. This is the only place in Scripture where this particular expression is found. The optimism of verses 7-13 show the psalmist's conviction of the assurance of the Lord's help, protection, and care in the foreseeable future. He expresses this optimism in vivid poetic form with various semblances such as love and faithfulness meeting together, faithfulness springing from the earth, righteousness looking down from heaven, and righteousness preparing the way for the Lord's steps. In these ways the psalmist shows his confidence that the Lord will fulfill his promises to the descendants of Jacob.

Psalms 123

Introduction and Summary

The superscription accompanying this psalm does not give information concerning its author but refers to it as "A Song of Ascents." There are fifteen "psalms of ascents" grouped together from Ps. 120 to Ps. 134. This is the fourth in the group. A variety of theories have been presented about the exact meaning of the superscription statement, "Song of Ascents." Most of these are just that, theories. Some believe the expression refers to those pilgrims who are going up to Jerusalem in celebration of one of the feasts, while others hold to the idea that it refers to the return of exiles and their ascension to the newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Since five of these psalms are assigned to the time of David or Solomon such a late date as the return from the Exile does not appear to be a complete explanation. Still others look at this title primarily as a description of the style of composition of the psalm. There appears to be no definitive information about the original meaning of the expression.

In this brief psalm of lament there is the dominance of the eyes as they view the throne of God, the masters of slaves, and the mistresses of maids. The plea for the Lord's mercy is the expression of one man but from verse 2b to the end of the psalm the psalmist speaks in behalf of the community which has endured much contempt, ridicule, and abuse. The expression, "our God" brings in the thought of the covenant relationship treasured by the psalmist.

Commentary

Verse 1 introduces a positive and negative aspect of life – a life of pain, yet one of hope in God. The psalmist lifts up his voice to God in adoration – the one who sits on the throne in heaven because he finds no comfort elsewhere. Luther is quoted by Perowne as saying, "This is a deep sigh of a pained heart, which looks round on all sides, and seeks friends, protectors, and comforters, but can find none. Therefore it says, 'Where shall I, a poor despised man find refuge? I am not so strong as to be able to preserve myself; wisdom and plans fail me among the multitude of adversaries who assault me; therefore I come to Thee, O my God, to Thee I lift my eyes O thou that dwellest in the heavens.'" (Perowne, vol. II, *op. cit.* p. 382.)

Verses 2-4 are not statements of despair but of hope and trust. Both Rhodes and Mays hold to this idea. Rhodes entitles the psalm, "Looking to the Lord," and Mays calls it "The King of Grace" showing the affirmation of trust in the presence of peril, abuse, and contempt from the arrogant ones. There is no further description of the particulars of these perils but it is evident that there is considerable adversity in the life of the community. The Lord is their only hope. (Rhodes, *op. cit.*, p. 168-169, Mays, *op. cit.*, p. 394.) Some have identified these enemies as the Samaritans who are mentioned in the time of Nehemiah but there is little real evidence of this in the psalm. The community ("we," first person plural) has undergone many problems and the psalmist sees himself speaking on their behalf as together they appeal to the Lord for his mercy and compassion.

Psalms 137

Introduction and summary

In order to do justice to this psalm it is necessary for us to review some information about the Babylonian Exile. The Bible gives us only a few details about the suffering of the Jews during this time, yet Ps. 137 is a vivid reminder of the bitterness which characterized much of this period of Jewish history. Unfortunately we generally pass over the Exile without looking at the contributions which history and archaeology can provide in giving us a better understanding the perils of the Captivity.

The way the psalmist expresses his sorrow is thought by some commentators to be a reflection of a person (perhaps a Levite) who has returned from the exile and is looking at the ruins of Zion mourning his past experience and that of other Exiles. The psalm then is a reminiscence of those bitter days. Thankfully, the poet is mourning over the past but the pain of those memories remains in his heart. The seventy year duration of the Captivity probably means that the psalmist had never seen the city of Jerusalem until he made his own journey to the homeland of his forefathers. Had his parents described to him the beauty of Zion, the holy city which he had never seen? Did they tell him of the religious festivals and celebrations so deeply cherished by some of his ancestors over a period of almost four centuries? Did he have a picture of the idol worship, corruption, immorality, and general apostasy of his forebears? Although these are real questions, we can only speculate about their answers. (Perowne, vol. II, *op. cit.*, pp. 430-431, Mays, *op. cit.*, p. 421, and Leslie C. Allen, *Word Bible Commentaries: Psalms 101-150,* (Dallas: Word Publishing Company), 1983, on CD.) Rhodes and some others however believe the psalm was written during the exile itself. The exact time of writing is of no particular consequence since the psalm vividly describes the conditions of the Exile whether present or past.

Within the hearts of the Exiles there was the longing to go to the land, even though most of the returnees had never lived there. Nevertheless, that was the homeland of their ancestors. We need to get under the skin of some of the exiles, and experience with them the deprivation, humiliation, and abuse they underwent as the captives of the Babylonians. At the same time, we must also attempt to understand the situation of some of the exiles whose lot was much better. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Esther, Nehemiah, and Ezekiel present very different pictures. They too suffered, but their peril was quite different from that of the less fortunate. Daniel, Nehemiah, and others had places in the courts of Babylon and Persia. Later, Esther's experience was unique. What was life like for the privileged and the underprivileged of the Exile? The 137th psalm is the expression of those who were among the deprived and abused of the Babylonian captives. What is their story?

Life during the exile

Judah was a constant problem for the Babylonians, even prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The people of Judah tried to throw off the Babylonian domination of Palestine but the armies of Nebuchadnezzar invaded three times, bringing the people to their knees and deporting groups of captives each time. In addition, each time the Chaldeans invaded they carried away some of the

treasure of the temple and the palace of the Judean king. When the final siege of the city took place Judah as an independent national entity came to an end. The well educated, the craftsmen, the artisans, and other productive people were removed to Babylon. The policy of the Babylonians was to bring captives from other nations into Chaldea to build up its cities and its economy.

However we must remember that although Judah was almost desolate and uninhabited some of the people remained in the land. They were the poor, unskilled, and uneducated – considered the dregs and worthless of their society. The Lachish Letters give some information about life in Palestine during this time. William F. Albright, who had been the Director of the American Schools of Oriental Research in Jerusalem and Biblical Archaeologist at Johns Hopkins University, says that the devastation of the cities of Judah was massive. He attacks "radical critics of biblical history," particularly C.C. Torrey, who deny the historicity of the Biblical account. Torrey claimed that there was no drastic break in the continuity of life in Judah following the Babylonian invasions. He rejected the historicity of the Biblical account, supposing that many Jews went into hiding at the time of the invasions and emerged soon afterwards to rebuild what needed to be rebuilt, and continued life pretty much as it had been all along. Torrey considered Ezra's account of the hardships of the returnees to be fabrications. On the other hand, Albright excavated various sites in southern Palestine. He gives a rather vivid picture of the devastation:

> A fair number of towns and fortresses of Judah have been excavated in whole or in part; many other sites have been carefully examined to determine the approximate date of their last destruction. The results are uniform and conclusive: many towns were destroyed at the beginning of the sixth century B.C. and never again occupied; others were destroyed at that time and partly reoccupied at some later date; still others were destroyed and reoccupied after a long period of abandonment, marked by a sharp change of stratum and by intervening indication of use for non-urban purposes. There is not a single known case where a town of Judah proper was continuously occupied through the exilic period. Just to point the contrast, Bethel, which lay just outside the northern boundary of Judah in pre-exilic times, was not destroyed at that time, but was continuously occupied down into the latter part of the sixth century.

(William F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, revised edition, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1960), pp. 141-142.)

Albright's excavations and study show the extent of the destruction in the southern part of Judah demonstrating the fact that the Jews suffered unspeakable devastation from the merciless army of Babylon.

Much of the Exile appears to have been a time of grief, sorrow, and persecution. There is Biblical and archaeological evidence that many of the poor and unskilled who were left in the land were barely able to survive under the greatly adverse circumstances in which they were left. Theodore H. Robinson says, "Archaeologically, the sixth century is almost a blank in southern Palestine. But small farmers still remained, and for their government the Chaldeans set up Gedaliah, a member of a Judean princely house, at Mizpah (II Kings 25:22ff.). It seems that the land began to recover under this wise and chivalrous nobleman and for a time there was hope.

But Gedaliah was murdered by a certain Ishmael, a scion of the old royal house. Fearing Chaldean vengeance most of the remaining people fled to Egypt taking with them Jeremiah among others (II Kings 25:25-27; Jer. 41:1—43:7)." (Theodore H. Robinson, "The History of Israel" in *The Interpreter's Bible*, George Buttrick, editor, vol. 1 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), p. 287.)

Although the Old Testament gives some information about the number of exiles taken by Nebuchadnezzar there is no way to know exactly what the total might have been because we do not know how complete this information is. The exiles settled down to a different life in a strange country but never became part of their new environment or of the culture of the Babylonians. The uniqueness of the religion of Israel and the people's perception of their covenant relationship to the Lord prevented them from becoming absorbed into the culture and religion of the Babylonians. Ultimately this worked to their advantage because they maintained at least a semblance of the bond between themselves and God. Without the temple and the offering of sacrifices they turned to an alternative form of worship and religious celebration, the synagogue. Although its origin is not definitely known, it is generally believed that the synagogue had its earliest roots here.

The early days of the Exile were probably not filled with the same degree of tyranny which developed a little later. Archaeological discoveries have even given the names of some Jews who carried on their own personal business activities. In addition, some of the captives had reached into the royal palace of Nebuchadnezzar. Among these were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Dan. 1:1-7. At least some of these men continued until the demise of the Babylonian Empire in the time of Belshazzar (Dan. 5:1-12).

In spite of this however, everything was not pleasant or secure for the Jews. Nebuchadnezzar had built a golden image in the Plain of Dura, and everyone was, on signal, required to bow down and worship the image. Those refusing to do so would suffer death by throwing them into a blazing furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused and were thrown into the furnace. Although this is seen as a somewhat isolated event, it may show that religious tyranny reigned in the Empire and the Jews certainly suffered as a result.

The Babylonians had internal political strife as well as religious problems during this era. Nebuchadnezzar had to put down various internal rebellions as well as rebellions among the conquered nations. Upon the death of Nebuchadnezzar his son, Amel-Marduk, known as Evil-merodach in the Old Testament (II Kgs. 25:27) became king and he immediately attempted to curb the power of the priests of Marduk. The priesthood turned against the king and he was assassinated having reigned only one year, 561-560 B.C. Neriglissar, a son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar led the conspiracy and assassination and then seized the Babylonian throne for himself. He reigned from 560 until 556 B.C. There can be little doubt that the political and religious unrest in Babylon took its toll in persecution against the captives from various nations but especially against the Jews because they denounced even the existence of other gods.

Nabonidus succeeded Neriglissar as king of Babylon and the persecution against the captive Jews appears to have become more severe. Nabonidus tried to enforce a uniform Babylonian

religion by replacing Marduk, the most important Babylonian god, with Sin, the moon-god. The mother of Nabonidus had been the high priestess of the temple of Sin located in Haran. Under Nabonidus systematic attempts were made to remove the other gods of Babylon. No doubt these actions resulted in very harsh treatment of the monotheistic Jewish community.

The question arises concerning the general polytheistic character of the Jews just prior to the exile which appears to conflict with the idea of their monotheism during the time of Nabonidus and earlier. We must remember that the Exile began in 587 B.C. but Nabonidus did not come to the throne of Babylon until 556 B.C. This means that the Jews had been in Exile for a little over thirty years when Nabonidus became ruler of the Empire. During that thirty year period the return to monotheism appears to have made significant progress and continued through the remaining forty years of the Exile. We must also keep in mind that from the beginning of the Exile there were some Jews who were faithful to the Lord, *e.g.* Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Prophets such as Jeremiah had warned the people that Exile to Babylon would be the punishment for their apostasy and the worship of other gods. When the Exile became a reality and the predictions of the Israelite false prophets had failed, the people appear to have been shocked into recognizing the truth of the warnings of Jeremiah and other prophets. Although there is no definitive answer to this question, we know the Jews who finally returned to Judah did so primarily as a monotheistic people. The religious policies of Nabonidus are thought to have brought additional persecution on the captive Jews.

Commentary

The true impact of this psalm cannot be appreciated unless we enter into the mood of the poet and the community of captives for whom he is speaking. For those who had been faithful to the Lord prior to the captivity being away from Zion was heart-breaking. No doubt the faithful among the Exiles attempted to instill in the unfaithful Exiles and the younger generation a sense of national and religious loyalty and a deep yearning for the homeland. The psalm is filled with a myriad of intense feelings. Sorrow, regret, loss, resentment, hate, and revenge all played a role in this.

Verse 1 introduces these feelings. It begins with a brief note describing the sad lot of the exiles. Canals and streams interlaced the roughly 30 mile (48 km.) strip of land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers near the city of Babylon. Here the exiles sat down and mourned their lot.

Verse 2 gives physical substance to the thoughts of their hearts. The harps (lyres) which gave voice to joy, gladness, and celebration were hung on the willow trees, separating the instruments of joy from the mourning of the captives. Sitting was the posture of mourning among the ancients. The willows which lined the canals and streams of this area are a species of poplar trees. The Exiles had no heart for music or the joy of songs. Hanging of one's lyre (harp) on the willow was symbolic of mourning, disappointment, and anguish. For generations the prophets of Israel and Judah had warned the people of the evil of their apostasy, immorality, corruption, abuse, injustices, neglect of the poor, dishonesty, and idol worship. Now the memories which they and they and their forefathers had created for themselves and their children were returning to haunt them.

Verse 3 shows how their captors added to the misery of their captives demanding that they sing "one of the songs of Zion." Perhaps their captors had heard of the joyous songs of celebrations which had characterized the religious and national events at the temple in Jerusalem.

Verse 4 tells us that in the mind of the poet he sees the ruins of Jerusalem described either as a returned exile actually observing the charred remains of the once beautiful city or as a captive remembering the awful ruins of his sacred homeland which had been destroyed by the invading and destructive armies of Nebuchadnezzar. The psalmist's question is mournfully asked: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" The humiliation of the downfall of their nation is vividly etched in the hearts of the Exiles. The poet may have been one of the temple musicians or a Levite, or a priest. In such case the contrast of the "then and now" would have been all the more vivid and could never be erased from his mind. If the poet is a returning exile he would have no personal memories of those days, seventy years ago, but only the descriptions of an older generation. On the other hand if the psalm was written during the exile itself, the poet's memories, and perhaps his former participation in the religious celebrations of Zion could have been crystal-clear in his mind.

Verse 5 moves from the expressions of the community to the poet's own personal vow. It would be better for his right hand to forget its skill and his tongue cling to the roof of his mouth than for him to forget the holy city. If he had been a singer or musician in the temple these phrases would not have had just a symbolic meaning, but a strong literal meaning as well. Here the psalmist uses poetic parallelism combined with the beauty of symbolism to describe the profound meaning of his vow. Not only is this his vow, but the thought of Jerusalem shall always be the highest plateau of his joy and gladness.

Verse 6 gives us a change in mood which is carried to the end of the psalm. Perhaps the thoughts of reprisal had been in his mind all along but now the poet gives voice to these deeply felt angry emotions. The Edomites, "cousins" of the Israelites," allied themselves with the Babylonian enemies instead of standing with their own "flesh and blood." The psalmist pictures the descendants of Esau cheering on the Babylonian invaders and calling for the complete destruction of Jerusalem. Their cry was, "Tear it down. Tear it down to its foundations." The psalmist's plea – "Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell."

Verse 8 is probably the most vengeful statement in the entire book of Psalms. The composer of this song of mourning sees the doom of Babylon as a foregone conclusion, whether as a past event, or as an inevitable future collapse. In a bitter expression of hatred he says, "Happy shall be the one who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!" Some have taken this statement out of context supposing that this is God speaking and venting his own anger against the Babylonians and advocating injury, torture, and death to innocent infants. We must remember that this is the statement of an exile or former exile expressing his own anger at his oppressors. Barbarous cruelty characterized ancient wars even more so than contemporary conflicts. This is especially the case with the Assyrians and Babylonians, both of whom have taken a prominent place in world history as some of the most ruthless conquerors ever recorded.

Chapter V
Psalms of Wisdom

Psalms of Wisdom

The smallest category of the Psalms is the Psalms of Wisdom. Only eight Psalms are generally placed in this classification: 1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 119, 127, and 128. In this chapter we will consider Psalms 1, 49, 73, and 127. The Hymns and Psalms of Lament appear to have played an important role in the ritual singing in some of the worship of Israel, but scholars believe that this was not the case with the wisdom Psalms. On the other hand, the superscriptions for some of the Psalms of wisdom specify music or ascent.

The general spirit of these Psalms is close akin to the Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. There is a basic emphasis on the blessings of God coming to those who are righteous but this characteristic is also found in many other Psalms as well.

Psalm 1

Introduction and Summary

It is noteworthy that this psalm provides a fitting introduction to the book as a whole, serving as a sort of prologue to the collection. For this reason Psalm 1 is generally thought of as a literary psalm rather than a psalm composed for formal worship. The structure of the psalm is as follows: (1) the foundation for righteousness (1:1-3); (2) the transitory character of ungodliness (1:4-5); (3) the contrast of the righteous with the wicked.

Stewart Perowne says that in some manuscripts of the Septuagint the first psalm is ascribed to David but this has very little objective support. James L. Mays states that the use of the word "blessed" may indicate a post-exilic date for this psalm. (Mays, *op. cit.,* p. 40.) This is the opinion of most scholars.

Perowne considers Ps. 1 to be very close akin to the book of Proverbs, basing his conclusion primarily on the content of the psalm. (Perowne, *op. cit.,* p. 108.) Patrick Miller says, "The poetry of Psalms 1 is reflected not only in the rich parallelism but also in the structure and movement of the psalm as a whole and the two similes of the tree and chaff that stand at the center of the psalm. The movement of the psalm revolves around and demonstrates the contrast of two ways of life: the way of righteousness (vv.1-3) and the way of the wicked (vv. 4-5)." (Miller *op. cit.,* p. 81.) At the beginning of the Psalter the reader is asked to consider these alternatives. The psalmist gives a rather a full description of the godly man but he gives only a brief description the ungodly man.

Some commentators have compared Psalm 1 and its description of the two ways, with the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus compares the narrow gate and the broad gate. One of these leads to life and the other leads to death. In the teaching of Jesus the kingdom of God plays a prominent role, causing us to think in terms of eternal life and eternal death. However it is doubtful that the psalmist had this in mind. There is a certain absolute character to what the psalmist says about the righteous and the unrighteous. He is not speaking of a person who has a little bit of righteousness along with some unrighteousness or of an unrighteous person who has a little bit of righteousness. Instead he is exalting the person who delights in the law of the Lord.

Commentary

Verse 1 begins with a blessing, describing the happy estate of the godly man. Some commentators say that a better translation of this would be "Oh, the happiness of." This happy situation is not automatically given to him by God. Instead it is the direct result of his activity. The terms "righteous" and "wicked" are important in the vocabulary of the Psalms. The psalmist is going to describe this happy estate in three different ways. First there is a negative, second there is the positive, and third there is the conclusion in the metaphor of the tree. The basis of this is the rightness or wrongness in one's response to the Lord's revelation and sovereignty over mankind. In this verse we have a three line synonymous parallelism. First the psalmist speaks of the negatives of this man. He does not walk in the council of the wicked, he does not stand in the way of

sinners, and he does he sit in the seat of mockers. Blessings such as these are found numerous times in the book of Psalms. This parallelism may be a progressive statement. First, the righteous man will not seek the counsel of the ungodly. Second, he refuses to stop and remain in the pathway of sinners. Third, he refuses to sit with those who sneer and scoff at truth and sacred things. His conclusion is, "I will not join such an awful crowd."

Verse 2 gives us the alternative to verse 1. At this point the psalmist tells us of the positives of this man. The delight of the righteous man comes from the Law of the Lord and he meditates on this Law constantly. In this statement the psalmist introduces us to the theme of the value of the law – a theme which is found frequently in the Psalms. Notice that the psalmist uses the word "delight." There is quite a difference between obeying God's law out of the sense of obligation compared with obedience which stems from delight in his law. This does not describe simple outward conformity to the law but a genuine pleasure experienced in the law of God. The godly Israelites did not view the Law as the great burden as some have supposed. See Ps. 19 and 119 where the Law is exalted, loved, and admired. However it is true that the unrighteous saw it as a burden particularly when many traditions were added to it as we see during the time of Christ.

Verse 3 describes the happy estate of this man by using the simile of a tree. The tree flourishes because it is planted by an abundant supply of water. This state of blessedness enjoyed by the godly man is not so much a reward as it is the natural results of his godly life. The prosperity of the righteous man reflects the wisdom of a life which is lived according to the plan of the Giver of life. The life of such a one is fruitful. "Whatever he does will prosper." The psalmist is not trying to tell us that there will never be a failure in the life of this man. Many of the Psalms describe the difficulties and even persecution of the righteous. See Psalm 37 and Psalm 73. In Psalm 1 the poet is telling us that it is axiomatic that the righteous man will be blessed.

Verses 4-5 reflect the opposite character. "The wicked are not so." That is, the wicked will not enjoy blessings that the righteous man enjoys. The life of the unrighteous man is unstable and is like the chaff which is driven away by the wind. This refers to winnowing of the grain at the time of harvest. As the grain is tossed into the air the wind carries away the chaff while the grain falls to the threshing floor. To the middle-eastern mind this would be a vivid contrast. The result of a man's ungodliness is that he will not stand in the judgment. The psalmist adds the parallel statement that the sinner will not stand in the assembly of the righteous. Once again we have the synonymous parallelism used by the psalmist to emphasize his point. The ungodly live for themselves and they cannot participate in the blessedness of the godly.

Verse 6 concludes the contrast. Notice the antithetic parallelism in the last verse. The psalm teaches without exception that each of the ways described has a destiny. The Lord watches over the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish. In the Biblical sense, the word "way" generally stands for a person's manner of life. The psalmist tells us that the happiness of a godly life and the instability of an ungodly life are not to be thought of as rewards and punishments but these are the natural fruit of the godly life vs. the ungodly life.

Psalm 49

Introduction and Summary

Even a casual reading of this psalm will show its kinship to the books of wisdom literature. The purpose of this psalm is to instruct people in certain fundamental issues of life. The psalmist does this by using the contrast of wealth and poverty. Jesus gave a similar lesson in the parable of the rich fool, *i.e.*, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses." This psalm, like the statement of Jesus is not a philosophical presentation but the simple statement of the facts of life. The psalmist's remarks are not addressed to the Hebrew people only but to all mankind. The content of the psalm shows affinity with Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes as well as Psalms 37 and 73.

Riches and success are not the keys to happiness. The writer of this psalm faces life squarely and deals with it fundamentally. The inequalities between the rich and the poor, the high and the low, the haves and the have nots will persist until death but in death all of us are the same. "You can't take it with you." Those who have wealth develop a false confidence in their wealth and in themselves. The money of the rich can purchase many things but their wealth cannot prevent death. It should be noticed however, that the psalmist does not speak of the wealthy as "wicked" or of the poor as "righteous." The wrong is not found in the wealth itself but in the confidence that men place in their wealth.

Different scholars divide the psalm in different ways. Some divide it into three parts but others divide it into four parts. We will consider the psalm to be divided into four parts. First, there is the introduction in which the psalmist calls on the whole world to listen (vss. 1-4). Second, there is the statement of the inadequacy of wealth (vss. 5-11). Third, the psalmist says that death is the destiny of both the wealthy and poor (vss. 12-15). Fourth, the psalmist shows the limitations of all earthly goods (vss. 16-20).

Commentary

In verses 1-4 the psalmist invites all the people of the world both high and low, rich and poor to listen to what he has to say. His mouth will speak wisdom and his meditations will bring understanding to the reader. These expressions remind us of the book of Proverbs. In verse 4 he refers to life as a riddle – a difficult problem of life. Psalm 73 addresses the same type of situation and Ps. 78:1-4 begins in a similar way.

In each of the first four verses he uses synonymous parallelism. It seems that the psalmist is really asking the question, "How can one maintain a trust in God when the wicked prosper and the righteous are impoverished?" The remainder of the poem attempts to answer this question but the answer is not based on reason or logic. Instead it places a heavy demand on one's trust in God.

Verses 5-11 form the next block speaking of the inadequacy of wealth. In verse 5 the poet asks why he should fear when evil days come. The word evil here is probably used in reference to

difficult times rather than moral/ethical evil. However, the synonymous parallel shows that it may also be referring to the evil things being done by wicked deceivers who surround him. Verses 6-7 show the futility of trusting in riches. No one, regardless of how wealthy he may be, can redeem the life of another. No amount of riches is adequate to redeem a life before God. William Taylor makes an interesting comment on this passage. "Though a man rule an empire, his domain at death is just a grave. Men leave their wealth to others. No one knows of what sort are their heirs." (Taylor, *op. cit.,* p. 257.) Man cannot redeem himself or another from the pangs of death. The implication is that only God can do this. The reason for this is the high cost of redemption. Notice again that the evil is not in the wealth as such but in one's confidence in his wealth. Wise and wealthy men die just as poor and foolish men die. At the point of death there is great equality among men. Verse 11 states that their tombs will be their houses forever. Once again we have a three line synonymous parallelism. The tomb will be their only place for endless generations.

Verses 12-15 continue the general theme of the inadequacy of wealth and inevitability of death. The psalmist makes the observation that this is the fate of those who trust in themselves. Trusting in the immortality of riches is a poor strategy. Death comes to the rich and poor alike. In verse 14 the word "sheol" appears. In the Old Testament this is frequently translated "grave." The LXX translates this word as αδης (*hadēs*) which comes into English as "hades." Its meaning is somewhat vague but it generally refers to the place of the dead or the place of departed spirits, the unseen world of spirits.

Verse14 says that the people just described are destined for the grave and "death will feed on them" (NIV). Because of variations in the manuscripts, the RSV and some other translations render this phrase "death shall be their shepherd." In verse 15 the psalmist claims that the wicked will decay in the grave far from their princely mansions but God will redeem the life of the psalmist. God "will surely take me to himself." Some commentators believe that the psalmist is looking back to the translation of Enoch or perhaps that of Elijah. The Old Testament gives very little information on the subject of immortality or eternal life. However, Stewart Perowne makes this statement: "We have, then, the strong hope of eternal life with God, if not the hope of a resurrection. In the preceding verses, in the very midst of the gloomy picture which the psalmist draws of the end of the ungodly, there breaks forth one morning ray of light, the bright anticipation of the final triumph of good over the evil." (Perowne, *op. cit.,* p. 400.)

Verses 16-20 form the conclusion of the psalm. The writer begins this conclusion by returning to his introduction, *i.e.,* the inadequacy of worldly success and wealth. Here again he says, "You can't take it with you." The wealthy man may have counted himself blessed during his life but in death his splendor is no more. While he lived, men praised him for his prosperity but in his death he joined the generations of his forefathers who will never see the light of life again.

Verse 20 gives the psalmist's ultimate conclusion. "A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish." In wisdom literature, the phrase "without understanding" generally carries the idea of "one who is without wisdom." When reading the psalm from a Christian perspective, one is reminded of Paul's statement to Timothy, "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (I Tim. 6:10) along with the statement of Christ, "How hard it is for the rich

to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Lk. 18:24-25.

Psalm 73

Introduction and Summary

Scholars are divided concerning the classification of this psalm because it has the characteristics of Psalms of Thanksgiving and of Psalms of Wisdom. It opens the collection of The Psalms of Asaph (Psalms 73-83, plus 50) who is mentioned as an ancestor of the Temple singers (Ezra 2:41).

There are some problems in life which never lose their interest. This is a story of a pilgrimage, penetrating deeply into the heart of religion showing the struggles of faith of an unknown Old Testament writer. This spiritual struggle is a brief twenty-eight verses summary of the experiences of Job. Both were godly men greatly perplexed by their own suffering as they searched for a deeper understanding of their very difficult situation. The psalm gives an interesting mixture of despair and hope. Some commentators state that this is the most profound expression of personal communion with God in the entire Psalter. The poet goes from skepticism to faith, from faith to communion with God, and from communion with God to become a witness for God.

Not only is this a psalm of wisdom, it is also an autobiographical psalm. The psalmist takes us through many of his struggles in life. His introduction in the first verse is much like his conclusion. He begins by saying that God has been good to Israel and he ends by saying that it has been good for him to be near God. Between his introduction and conclusion he tells of some of the many problems which he encountered when he saw the "blessedness" of the wicked. All of the appealing things of life – freedom, luxury, and affluence – appeared to be experienced by these wicked people. All of their desires are satisfied and they experience few restraints. In contrast to this, the psalmist sees himself under many restraints and he experiences punishment every morning. This dilemma seems to characterize his whole life. After recognizing and stating this he says that there was a time when he was senseless, acting like a brute beast. However, there finally comes a strong affirmation of his faith and his reliance on God. Throughout the psalm, the poet frequently uses synonymous parallelism to describe both the evil and the righteous.

The psalm divides itself into five sections. First there is the introduction and statement of the theme (verses 1-3). Second is the description of the unrighteous and the poet's statement of his own doubt (verses 4-14). Third is his optimistic statement of faith (verses 15-20). Fourth is his confession and statement of his hope in God (verses 21-26). Fifth is the response of the witness of God's goodness (verses 27-28).

Commentary

Although verse 1 is an introduction it actually gives the poet's conclusion. He states that God is good to Israel; that is to those who have a pure heart. Having said this, he begins to prove his point. Looking at the psalm as a whole, it appears that the psalmist feels that he had to experience difficulties that challenged his faith before he could come to this conclusion.

In verses 2-3 he briefly describes the situation and his attitude toward the rich. His life and thoughts had been guided by his envy of the wealthy. This problem appears frequently in the Old Testament. See Ps. 17:14-15, 37:1, 92:7, Job 12:6, 21:7, Eccl. 8:14, Jer. 12:1-3, Hab. 1:13. In this introduction, the psalmist is not speaking about his survival but rather the challenge to his faith. Verse 3 is the statement of his problem. The poet was standing on a slippery slope which almost cost him his relationship with God. The resolution of the problem is not deliverance from danger but rather a better understanding of God's ways and acceptance of God's moral government of the world. Neither Job nor the Psalms present any real solution to this problem but both attempted to instill in us a feeling of trust and humility. As the psalmist writes his poem, he is looking back on the success that he has experienced in conquering the challenges to his faith. He now shares with his readers those experiences and struggles.

Verses 4-5 give us the social situation which created his doubts. Linguists tell us that the translation of portions of these verses present problems because it is difficult to translate the exact *idea* from the original language into another language. One of the problems encountered in translating ancient languages into contemporary languages is that there are not always equivalent words in the original compared with the contemporary. Culture, customs, traditions, etc. also play an important role in translation. The KJV translates verse 4 "For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm." The ASV is similar. The RSV leaves out the idea of death and translates it "For they have no pangs; their bodies are sound and sleek." The NIV translates it, "They had no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong." The translation in the KJV and ASV almost sounds like the rich are assured of security in their death but the psalmist is not speaking of a happy ending in the death of these of evil people but quite the opposite. To take this statement in a literal sense contradicts the general tone of the psalm. The sense is that people of wealth do not feel threatened by death because they have the resources to maintain strong healthy bodies. They appear to be free from the burdens which the common man confronts everyday. The psalmist expresses this by saying they are not plagued by these cares.

Verse 6 uses synonymous parallelism to speak symbolically of these people. Pride is their necklace and violence is their clothing. In a practical sense, many people are attracted by the alluring lifestyle of the wealthy. Arnold Rhodes refers to this as a practical atheism (Rhodes, *op. cit.*, p. 108.) Apparently the wealth and independence of these people has caused them to oppress others. Scholars seem to agree that there are difficulties in the translation of portions of verse 7. Not only is the manuscript evidence difficult but there is also difficulty concerning the exact meaning of some of the words. The KJV reads, "Their eyes stand out with fatness" and the RSV reads "Their eyes swell out with fatness." However, the NIV reads, "From their callous hearts comes iniquity." Stewart Perowne says that the whole figure is highly expressive as a picture of the proud satisfaction that often shines in the eyes of the well-to-do of the world. The word "fatness" is frequently used to describe prosperity – sometimes excessive prosperity. See Deut. 31:20 and Deut. 32:15. The arrogant conceit of these people knows no limits.

Verses 9-11 tell us that the pride of these people makes them think that they own heaven and earth. Some will follow them in spite of their blasphemies. In their arrogance they think God is stupid and that he knows nothing of their activities. For a similar statement see Ps. 10:11 and Job 22:12-14. Notice the synonymous parallelism in verse 9.

Verse 12 gives an additional description of the wealthy. They appear to be carefree as they increase in wealth. By contrast, verse 13 gives a picture of the struggles of the psalmist. Although he is trying to live a righteous life, he sees the possibility that his whole life is vain because he is suffering so terribly. "In vain, have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence." In verse 14 he concludes that righteousness brings punishment.

In the next section, verses 15-20, the psalmist speaks of his direct obligation of his own people whom he calls "your children," *i.e.,* the children of God. However, the expressions "God's children" or "children of God" are not found in the Old Testament. If the psalmist had expressed to his own people the sentiments which he wrote down in verses 12-14 he would be betraying their trust. In verse 16 he says that when he pondered these things such thoughts were oppressive to him until he entered the sanctuary of God. The experience of the presence of God in the sanctuary caused him to understand the final destiny of those unholy and evil wealthy men.

In this experience he moved from the uncertainty of riches to the certainty of faith. Nothing is said about his activity in the temple sanctuary. Perhaps it was during one of the annual festivals that the memories of God's mercy came into focus and he found a spiritual balance. Or perhaps at some juncture in his life he paused long enough to review the history of his people and came face to face with the goodness of God. As part of this contemplation he saw the fleeting character of human achievement particularly the successes of the wicked. Suddenly all of the accomplishments of the wealthy evil are swept away by the terror of it all. This experience in the sanctuary put new light on the poet's own misfortune. The achievements of the wicked are as unreal as the fantasies of a dream.

Verses 21-26 give us the poet's confession and his expression of hope. He concludes that he acted with the stupidity and ignorance of a brute beast when he became so embittered. In verse 23 he expresses his total dependence on God. See Hab. 3:17-18 for a similar statement. God had grasped the psalmist's right hand in support. In verse 24 he acknowledges God's protection, counsel, and guidance. Also in verse 24 we have one of the few instances where immortality is hinted at in the Old Testament. Stewart McCullough and some other commentators believe that this should be translated "in honor" rather than "to glory." However McCullough makes allowance for the fact that the Jews later developed a belief in immortality. Although the subject is not frequently expressed in the Old Testament, there is every reason to believe that this is a part of God's revelation. See Gen. 5:24, II Kgs. 2:3-10, and Ps. 49:15. In verses 25-26 the psalmist shows that God is his only hope.

Finally verses 27-28 express the fate of the unrighteous and the refuge of God for the righteous. The affirmation of verse one has indeed become a reality. James L. Mays expresses it in this way: "The goodness of God is not defined by the *shalom* the wicked enjoy, nor is it denied by the afflictions suffered by the pure in heart. The ultimate misery is to be 'far from God' (v.27). The everlasting *shalom* is to be 'near God' (v.28)." (Mays, *op. cit,* p. 244.) *Shalom* is the Hebrew word for 'peace.'

Psalm 127

Introduction and Summary

This brief psalm is the eighth in the collection of "ascent Psalms" (Ps. 120-134) in book five of the Psalter. It extols the blessings of fatherhood. Some scholars believe that the two parts of the psalm, verses 1-2 and 3-5, may have originally circulated separately but there is no objective evidence of this. The two sections of the psalm are far apart in their basic content but there is a strong theological connection. Fruitful work and fruitful family life are both the blessings of God which come from the common endeavors of mankind. Perhaps we can summarize this psalm by saying that it is teachings some of the basic principles and practices in life that yield the greatest blessings of happiness.

The psalm is attributed to Solomon in the superscription. In the book of Proverbs Solomon extols the importance and noble character of work. The well-known example of initiative and industry are illustrated by the lowly little ant in Prov. 6:6-11. Such similarities have caused some scholars to believe that Psalm 127 was written by Solomon. On the other hand, William Taylor and some others believe that the wisdom of the psalm reflects the post exilic period. (Taylor, *op. cit.* p. 668.)

Commentary

In this psalm there are four areas of mankind's common interests. The first, found in verse 1, speaks of the importance of one's trust in God as he builds his house: "Unless the Lord builds the house the builders labor in vain." Some commentators believe that the house being spoken of is in fact the family or perhaps the nation of Israel. On the other hand, the psalmist may be simply saying that God is the builder of all good things. In the New Testament James makes a similar statement: "Every good and perfect gift is from above" (Jms. 1:17). The psalmist makes the same observation concerning the one who watches over the security of the city.

The second area of man's common interests is found in the one who is in charge of the security of city. He too must trust in the Lord for success.

The third area of mankind's common interests is in verse 2. Here he speaks of the futility of those who wake up early and stay up late working for their food. Arnold Rhodes says, "The efforts of the builder, watchman, or any other diligent laborer fail to achieve their purpose apart from the blessings of God. . . . This implies that man should undertake only that which is in harmony with the will of God." (Rhodes, *op. cit.*, p. 171.) The psalmist is not trying to degrade the importance of hard work but he is speaking of the blessings of God coming to those who trust in God as they work. This is a warning against fretting and anxiety.

Verses 3-5 give us the fourth area of man's endeavors, *i.e.* the family. These verses form the second section of this brief psalm. The KJV uses the word "children" rather than "sons." Scholars generally prefer "sons" in this phrase. Sons who were born while the father was young

brought a particular blessing. Among the Middle Eastern people sons were usually preferred because it was through the sons that the family name was carried and the protection of the family was enhanced. We also notice that the genealogies are always given through the male rather than the female. The men were given the role of the protectors of the family and this is probably what the psalmist had in mind when he speaks of the arrows in the quiver of a hunter.

Chapter VI
Psalms of Zion
The Enthronement Psalms

Introduction to the Psalms of Zion

As we have stated many times, scholars do not always agree on classification of the Psalms. This is a particularly true in reference to the Psalms of Zion which Gunkel considered to be a small subcategory and he referred to them as Psalms of the Enthronement. Scholars also differ about which psalms belong in this subcategory.

Scholars generally believe that Enthronement Psalms in pagan celebrations refers to an eschatological event in which their god was annually enthroned as the sovereign of the universe. This celebration was very popular among the Babylonians and the Canaanites, leading many scholars to conclude that the Enthronement Psalms of Israel were in celebration of a similar event, probably the New Year celebration. Accordingly, the God of Israel was once again proclaimed to be the all powerful warrior king and he would overrule all who opposed his universal authority. (Toombs, *op. cit.*, p. 257.) In describing this, Stewart Taylor says that the Lord "is taking his seat on his throne to exercise his dominion over the world for the coming year, just as Marduk was installed as king over the world in the Babylonian ceremonies of the New Year." (Taylor, *op. cit.* p. 245.) Taylor recognized however, that there is no Old Testament evidence for such a celebration among the Israelites. In postexilic times the number of festivals appears to have increased, *i.e.* the Feast of Dedication and the Feast of Purim, and this has caused some scholars to consider certain psalms as postexilic fitting them into the Babylonian enthronement traditions.

This theory depends too heavily on the Babylonian and Canaanitish myths of the celebration of the annual enthronement of their pagan gods. In addition this position ignores the uniqueness and monotheism of the faithful in Israel. See the section entitled "The Enthronement of God" in the introductory chapter. Roland Murphy, in his discussion of the Enthronement Psalms calls attention to some important principles. First the Lord is saluted as king but this does not indicate that he has not always been king. Second, the fact that he is frequently spoken of as the Creator shows that he has always been king. There is no foundation for the idea that the Lord was in a mythical battle with chaos as some scholars would have us believe. Third, he is represented not only as the king of Israel but also as the king of the whole earth. (Murphy, *op. cit*. p. 572.) When we consider these Enthronement Psalms in their proper context we can see that they are celebrating the enthronement of one of the kings of Israel not the annual enthronement the Lord. In a variety of places in the Old Testament the coronation of the new king was celebrated with shouts of joy. See II Sam 15:10, I Kgs. 1:38-40, II Kgs. 9:13. We must also remember that some of these Psalms extol the universal sovereignty of the Lord though not in the sense of the Babylonian and Canaanite traditions.

Psalm 46

Introduction and Summary

Stewart Perowne and some other scholars believe that Psalms 46, 47, and 48 were written in celebration of the deliverance which Judah experienced when the army of Sennacherib was miraculously destroyed at the city of Jerusalem (II Kgs. 19:1-13, 35-37). This took place in the eighth century B.C. Sennacherib had enjoyed practically uninterrupted success as he destroyed city after city in his exploits in the southern part of Judah and other parts of the Middle East. (Perowne, *op. cit.,* pp. 379-380.) On the other hand some scholars believe this psalm came out of the third century B.C. celebrating the Jews' deliverance from the Syrians close to the time of the Maccabean revolt. William Taylor and others believe that this is a celebration of the New Year's festival. Lawrence Toombs believes that the Psalm is an attempt to describe the end of the age, and is therefore eschatological. (Toombs, *op. cit.*, p. 276.) There is very little evidence in the Psalm to indicate the time of its writing or the events to which the psalmist may be pointing. Martin Luther's beautiful hymn, "A Mighty Fortresses is Our God" was inspired by this Psalm.

The Psalm divides itself into three sections generally referred to as strophes. They are separated by the musical notation, *Selah*. The actual meaning of the word *Selah* is unknown but scholars believe that it is a notation calling for a pause in the music. This word should not be read aloud as part of the text. The first section, verses 1-3 speaks of God as a refuge for his people. The second section verses 4-7 speaks of God's protection of Zion. The third section verses 8-11 speaks of God's universal sovereignty. Each of the eleven verses of this Psalm is made up of synonymous parallelisms.

Commentary

Verse 1 begins with the strong affirmation of faith. The psalmist is fully convinced of the power of God to protect his people and the Holy City. This is also declared in the refrains of verses 7 and 11. Taylor says that the word translated "strength" can also be rendered "defense." The word carries with it the idea of a strong tower. Toombs believes that the imagery of the first section originated in the mythology of the primeval chaotic waters of the underworld. (Toombs, *op. cit.*, p. 276.) However the most obvious point is that the beauty of the first verse is a simple affirmation of trust in God as our refuge and strength, and an ever-present help in trouble. The idea of God as "refuge and strength" is frequency found in the Psalms. Thus this is a true confession of the faith of the poet, not a reference to mythology.

Verses 2-3 draw the conclusion of the psalmist's faith, *i.e.* that the congregation of Israel will have no fear regardless of the circumstances of life. Some scholars believe that the psalmist's use of the first person plural indicates that the congregation is reciting at least part of this psalm in unison. When verse 2 states, "therefore we will not fear," the reason, though not explicitly stated is that God is with us. The psalmist symbolically describes the faith of the community by speaking of the victory of their faith even though the earth may give way, the mountains fall into the sea, and the water is roaring and forming. We should see this as a symbolic description of human turmoil rather than the idea of the mythological origin of the universe being described in

the poem. In all of this, God is their refuge in strength. The psalmist calls on the most secure figure that he can imagine when he speaks of a mountain being cast into the sea. The second and third sections (verses 4-7 and verses 8-11) each conclude with a refrain but the first section (verses 1-3) has no such refrain.

The second section or strophe is made up of verses 4-7. It turns from the clear affirmation faith to extol God's protection of the city and the Temple. The psalmist refers to the general flow of a peaceful stream of water. Part of the water supply for the city of Jerusalem came from the spring of Gihon. During the reign of Hezekiah the Assyrians, led by Sennacherib, planned an attack on the city of Jerusalem. Just prior to the attack Hezekiah had a tunnel dug from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam. This was done in order to assure the city of supply of water in case of a siege by the Assyrian army. As stated above, these details have caused some scholars to believe that this psalm written in celebration of the miraculous destruction of the Assyrian army when Sennacherib was planning to destroy the city of Jerusalem.

Notice in verse 4 that the psalmist speaks of the Holy Place where the Most High dwells. The pagans believed that their "holy places" were the actual dwelling places of their gods. This is by no means the idea that the psalmist had in mind however. At the time of the building of the tabernacle God said that this would be the place where *his name* would dwell. The protection of the city is emphasized in the 5th verse where the psalmist says, "God is within her, she will not fall." It was generally thought that the most dangerous time for the watchmen was just before morning. The power of God is seen in verse 6 as the nations are in an uproar and kingdoms fall. He lifts his voice and the earth melts. Such is the statement of the power of the Lord. The strophe ends in verse 7 with the refrain, "The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

The third strophe, verses 8-11, emphasizes God's universal sovereignty. The psalmist invites his audience to come and see the mighty acts of the Lord and the desolation he had brought on the earth. Without doubt he is referring to the death and destruction on the enemies of God but this statement has caused some to believe that this psalm is a prophetic eschatological writing, referring to the consummation of all things. In his power the Lord makes wars to cease and destroys the implements of war. He breaks the bow, he shatters the spear, and he burns the shield. It is extremely doubtful that the original recipients of this psalm would have considered it eschatological.

In the midst of the chaos of war and destruction described earlier in the psalm there is a very dramatic statement made by God. He simply says, "Be still and know that I am God." The translation "Be still" can also mean "to cease" or "to stay." All of the victories, all of the power, all of the sovereignty belong to God alone. Mankind must stand back in awe; the nations shall confess the mighty truth of the majesty his power and sovereignty. This is followed in verse 11 by the refrain which is also seen in verse 7; "The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is a fortress."

Psalm 47

Introduction and Summary

This Psalm, along with Psalm 46, is generally thought of as another Psalm of the Enthronement. In this hymn of triumph, the singer calls on all nations of the earth to praise the Lord. Perowne says that in a sense this psalm could be called Messianic or a prophecy of the final triumph of God's kingdom because there are numbers of references to God as the ruler of the earth. He also says that in rabbinic thought it was considered Messianic. Some of the older Christian expositors believed that the psalm was written at the time David had the Ark of the Covenant moved to Mount Zion (II Sam. 6). Some of the older expositors also believed that this psalm was prophesying the ascension of Christ. When we consider the psalm from the point of view of the original readers and hearers this is easily seen as a faulty conclusion. A variety of other theories of authorship and date of composition have also been advocated. These range from the time of David to the time of Jehoshaphat and on to the postexilic period. Perowne believes that this psalm, like Psalm 46, was composed at the time that the army of Sennacherib was miraculously destroyed. The theme of the psalm is that the Lord is King of the earth. As such he has exalted the nation of Israel. They are the pride of Jacob whom God loved. They are the people of the God of Abraham.

In its structure the psalm divides itself into two basic sections; verses 1-5 and verses 6-9. There are two calls to worship, verse 1 and verse 6, and two sets of reasons for worship, verses 2-6 and verses7-9. This gives the effect of the double hymn.

Commentary

In verse 1 we have the first call to worship. The call is universal in which all nations are invited to join. The expressions, "Clap your hands" and "shout to God with cries of joy" probably reflects the joy of either the coronation of the king or a celebration of the anniversary of that event. This was common in Israel. See II Sam. 15:10, II Kgs. 9:13, 11:12. In verse 2 the psalmist expresses this by saying that the Lord is awesome, he is the Most High, and he is the King over all the earth.

Verses 3-5 show how this awesome King has provided many blessings for Israel. In behalf of his chosen people he has subdued nations and people at the feet of Israel. He has chosen Israel as his inheritance. Since Israel is a theocracy there is always the blending of their religious and their national identities. Not only is their earthly king acknowledged as their ruler, but God is also acknowledged as their ultimate ruler and King.

The second section, verses 6-9 begins with the second call to worship. "Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praise to our King, sing praises." God is proclaimed "the King of all the earth." The people are exhorted to sing praises to God in psalms. He is seated on his holy throne and rules over the nations.

Verse 9 is thought by some to be prophetic, predicting the time when the nobles of all the nations will assemble as the people of the God of Abraham. The reason was that "the kings of the earth belong to God and he is greatly exalted." (NIV) In almost all English translations the expression is, "the *shields* of the earth" rather than "the *kings* of the earth." At times the NIV takes interpretative liberty in its translation. God had promised to Abraham that it would be through his seed that all of the families of the earth would be blessed. Although Paul speaks of all Christians as Abraham's seed through faith in Jesus Christ, Gal. 3:26-29, it is doubtful that this would have been in the minds of the psalmist or the original readers and hearers of the Psalm. Instead this verse appears to be an exclamation of the absolute sovereignty of God.

Psalm 93

Introduction and Summary

The Enthronement Psalms all carry a single theme; the exaltation of the Lord as the ruler of the universe. As stated earlier, in pagan literature this depicted a pagan god annually enthroned as the ruler of the world. However, the Enthronement Psalms in the Old Testament simply proclaim and celebrate the reign of the Lord and his sovereignty, not an annual reenthronement as practiced in the Babylonian or Canaanite traditions. The 93rd psalm declares that "The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty and is armed with strength.

The poet speaks of the seas being lifted up; an expression which many commentators assign to the chaotic waters of a primeval world. The Lord however is stronger and he prevails. He is the Creator of the world and the powers of nature obey him. He is mightier than the waves of the sea and their thunderous roar. None of this however reflects the pagan customs, celebrations, and traditions of a primeval chaotic sea.

In the LXX this Psalm has a title which designates it as a psalm to be read on the day before the Sabbath (Friday) when the world was first inhabited. The Talmud says that when God completed his creation on Friday, the sixth day, he began his rule over all of the creatures of the earth. Therefore this psalm was read on that day.

The Psalm celebrates the kingship of God. It does not have a call to worship as many of the other Enthronement Psalms have. Once again in this psalm the Lord is seen as the ruler of the universe. He is the Creator of the world and he has been the king from everlasting. All of the powers of nature obey him.

Commentary

In verse 1 the text reads, "The Lord reigns," or, "The Lord is King." Scholars are divided concerning the correct translation of this, some saying that it should read, "The Lord *has become* king." Perowne contends that this would be a more nearly correct translation but he believes that it means that the Lord's kingdom has been visibly set up, presumably as the nation of Israel, and his power and majesty are fully acknowledge. On the other hand other scholars again take this to mean that the Psalm is an Israelite imitation of the Babylonian celebration of the annual enthronement of their pagan god, Marduk, as ruler of the universe. However, the King in this Psalm is pictured as warrior who has clothed himself with majesty and strength. He is the One who cannot be represented by an image of wood or stone. He is the Creator of the world and the world is firmly established under his rulership. The sovereignty of the Lord is expressed in his complete control of the universe. The world over which he rules is "firmly established and cannot be moved." When the expression, "his throne [or kingdom] is established" occurs in the Old Testament it usually carries the idea that the king's rulership is firmly secure. The same idea is

true when the psalmist speaks of the world as being "established." The Psalm paints a word picture of the One who is eternal, all powerful, and the sovereign of the universe.

Verse 2 declares that the Lord's rulership is not measured in years because his throne was established long ago and he is from all eternity. That is, he is everlasting and all the forces of nature obey him. In verse 3 the King is said to be mightier than the sea which lifts up its pounding waves. Again, this may be a polemic opposing the Babylonian creation.

Verse 4 says that the seas may have lifted up their voices but they will not prevail against the power of their Creator. This too could be a polemic against the pagan traditions and customs of the annual enthronement of their gods. Thus the poet could be drawing a contrast between the omnipotent eternal God of Israel on the one hand and the powerless false gods of the Babylonians and Canaanites on the other. Since verse 4 appears to be a response to the statement of verse 3, some commentators believe that verses 3 and 4 may have been sung antiphonally.

Verse 5 makes a final statement of the ultimate meaning of the psalm; "Your statutes stand firm; holiness adorns your house for endless days O Lord." This also is in strong contrast to the Babylonian and Canaanite concept the character of their gods. Some believe that the word "statutes" is referring to God's immutable power over nature but the word is generally used to refer to the commandments of God.

Psalm 122

Introduction and Summary

Psalms 120 through 134 are referred to as "Psalms of ascent." Three of these are attributed to David and one is attributed to Solomon. The rest are anonymous. The superscription on Psalm 122 ascribes it to David as a psalm of ascent. Of course it is possible that it was written by him but the tenor of the poem seems to indicate that it was written by someone who did not live in Jerusalem.

Arnold B. Rhodes and other scholars believe that this psalm was written by a grateful pilgrim. He also says, "Certain grammatical constructions and the backward look to the time of the Davidic kings (vs. 5) indicate a postexilic date." (Rhodes, *op. cit.* p. 167.) Perowne says that it was evidently written with the reference to one of the three yearly festivals of Israel when caravans of pilgrims filled the Holy City. Many scholars believe that it is postexilic, basing their conclusion on the verb tense in statements in verse 5 and elsewhere which are sometimes translated as past tense. Translators however, are about evenly divided as to whether these verbs should be translated as present tense or past tense. The present tense would indicate that the psalm is not necessarily postexilic. The date of this and most other Psalms still appears to be an open question.

The psalmist speaks of his joy when the time came to go to the house of the Lord. If, indeed he was a pilgrim who lived away from Jerusalem this would have been an outstanding opportunity for him. He paints a word picture of the thrill of his heart as he approaches the city and the house of the Lord. He describes the stately beauty of the Lord's house because this is a place where the tribes go up to praise the Lord.

Throughout its history of the city of Jerusalem has not been a city of peace. Hostility and attacks by its enemies have marked much of its history but with the beauty and tranquility of the moment the psalmist calls for prayer for the peace of the city. After the building of Solomon's Temple Jerusalem was certainly considered the center of the religious celebrations of the Jews but even as early as the time of David the city may have been thought of in that way.

This Psalm divides itself into three sections. Verses 1-2 are introductory, verses 3-5 are statements of praise of Jerusalem, and verses 6-9 are prayers for the peace of Jerusalem.

Commentary

Verse 1 uses the expression, "the house of the Lord" which states the theme of the Psalm. The same statement appears in the ninth verse. The psalmist pictures himself approaching the city with almost inexpressible joy as he looks forward to communion with God. In verse 2 he is overwhelmed with the fact that he can stand within the gates of the Holy City. Linguists say that the word "stand" can also be translated in the perfect tense, "have stood." This would mean that he was still standing there. The perfect tense describes an action which began in the past and continues into the present. Perowne mentions that in some translations the past tense, "stood" is used here but he says the uncertainty of using this form creates difficulty in interpreting the

Psalm. If this is, in fact, a day of festival celebration no doubt the psalmist would be surrounded by other worshippers in the courts of the Temple. He sees this as an indescribable privilege.

Verses 3-5 sing the praises of Jerusalem. It is built as a city compacted together. This has been viewed in a variety of ways. Some commentators believe it means that the city was well built and stately. Others believe that it means it was closely joined together because the city itself is surrounded by valleys. Still others believe that the expression may refer to the city which was rebuilt after the Exile. Perowne and other commentators who consider this psalm to be postexilic believe that verse 4 is the poet's reminiscing or perhaps recalling history when the tribes of Israel went up to the city. On the other hand some scholars translate this in the present tense. In verse 5 we have a similar situation about the tenses of the verb when the psalmist speaks of the thrones of judgment which "stand" or which "stood" there. Whichever may be the correct translation the fact is that the writer is overwhelmed with a history of this place. It is clear that in verse 5 the psalmist looks back to the dynasty of David. In Deut. 17:8-9 there is the instruction that justice should be meted out "at the place the Lord your God will choose." Those with legal issues were to present them to the priests who would issue a verdict. The expression, "the place the Lord your God will choose" may be referring to the sanctuary of the Temple since the Lord had said that this is where his name would dwell. However, the phrase "house of the Lord" was used as early as Judg. 19:18 and I Sam. 1:7 apparently referring to the tabernacle. Once again we see the idea of theocracy which was a very important concept to the faithful Israelites.

Verses 6-9 are the psalmist's prayer for the city. The prayer is for the peace of city for he sees that many blessings will come to the people if the city lives in peace. If this peace becomes a reality there will be love, security, and friendship for all who dwell there. He concludes by saying, "For the sake of the house of the Lord our God I will seek your prosperity." Some translations say "I will seek your good."

The psalmist expresses his joy in seeing the city and expressing his concern for its peace. James L. Mays notes the stark contrast to the statement of Jesus who "saw the city and wept over it" (Lk. 19:41-44). Jesus greeted the city, not with joy but with sorrow for he was able to see the hearts of the religious leaders who headquartered in Jerusalem and with these men he found great disappointment. (Mays, *op. cit.* p. 394.)

Chapter VII
Psalms of Community Thanksgiving

Introduction

Once again the scholars differ in reference to the classifications of these psalms. Most scholars take into account the Psalms of Thanksgiving of Individuals but give little attention to the Psalms of Thanksgiving of the Community as a separate category. In addition, most scholars consider these songs to be very close in their classification to the hymns and treat them under that general heading. Some scholars disagreed with Gunkel because he practically ignored this as a classification. Roland Murphy says, "Be that as it may, the structure and motif of the so-called thanksgiving psalms are distinctive enough to deserve separate treatment." (Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 10.)

These psalms tend to draw lessons from various experiences of the nation as a whole rather than simply from the individual. We should also remember that in many other psalms we find expression of thanksgiving from the individual and also from the community. Johannes Hempel says that the hymns had an overwhelming influence on the songs of thanksgiving. In general these psalms contained narratives based on the wonderful works of God, not in creation or history but in recent events. (Johannes Hempel, "The Book of Psalms," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, George A. Buttrick, editor, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 949.)

Many psalms in this category are divided into three elements. First there is praise (thanksgiving) which is addressed to the Lord. In the psalms of praise this usually comes from a cry for help which may or may not have already been fulfilled. However in the psalms of thanksgiving this expression comes from gratitude for that which the Lord has already done. Roland Murphy says that the Hebrew word which is translated "to thank" is the same as the word translated "to praise." (Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 949.) Linguists generally say that in the mind of the Hebrews these concepts are inseparable. It is sometimes very difficult for these ideas to come through in translation into another language. The second element is usually an invitation to the community to worship. This may include only the nation of Israel but it sometimes incorporates all nations of the earth. Third, in some of these psalms this is followed by another expression of praise or the promise of sacrifices.

Psalm 67

Introduction and Summary

The superscription of this psalm says that for the director of music with stringed instruments. It is then referred to simply as "A psalm." There is the very little information in the psalm itself to give us an idea of the date of writing. Although a composer is not named in the superscription, Perowne concludes that it came much later than the time of David. He believes it probably came from the time of Hezekiah or perhaps after the return from the Exile. He bases this primarily on the psalm's reflection of the revival of the hopes of the returnees as expressed in books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

There are differences among scholars concerning the tenses of the main verbs in this psalm. Most agree that it begins with a wish or a hope (future). However, from verse 3 forward there are differences in interpretation, based primarily on the tenses of the verbs. Perowne contends that throughout the psalm the verbs are expressing a wish (future). Other scholars however believe that these are expressions of thanksgiving for past favors of the Lord, which would put them in the past tense. It may be that this is a device of the psalmist to reflect both points of view.

Various scholars believe that the psalm was written in celebration of the harvest spoken of in verse 6. This would probably be associated with the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast and Ingathering, as it is also called, placing it in late September or early October. Verses 3 and 5 have identical refrains: "Let the people give thanks to Thee O God."

Commentary

The psalm is a subtle combination of thanksgiving and requests. The poet begins by saying "May God be gracious to us and bless us," which may be the expression of gratitude for the past and the need of assurance for the future. In this way the psalmist expresses his dependence upon God. The phrase in verse 1a, "and make his face shine upon us" reflects the wording of the Aaronic Benediction in Num. 6:22-27. The meaning of the phrase, "make his face shine upon us" is the ancient idea of approval, good will, and blessing. The opposite of the shining face of God is for God to hide his face as in Is. 59:2.

Verse 2 shows that a part of the theme of the psalm is for all the nations to praise God – "that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations." But knowing God is not restricted to a mental activity. Instead, it includes experiential knowledge and the interaction of a close relationship with God. In addition, the saving work of the Lord is not a reference to eternal salvation but God's constant presence in the history of Israel. Although the Lord's promise to Abraham included all nations of the earth, it is doubtful that the nationalism of the Israelites at the time this psalm was written would have allowed such universality in their thoughts. On the other hand, this idea always brings up the question about the mindset of Israel concerning other nations. William Taylor believes that such a statement basically is an expression that God's goodness to Israel is a revelation to all the world of the way God deals with those who fear him.

"Such a clear demonstration of God's gracious providence should move all the people of the earth to join with Israel in giving him reverence and worship." (Taylor, *op. cit.,* p. 351.) This also appears to strike a missionary spirit as is expressed in parts of Isaiah and also in the book of Jonah. To Jonah's dismay – but some believe it was not to Jonah's surprise – God was lovingly interested in the people of Nineveh. The missionary aspect of this psalm has caused Taylor and others to favor a post exilic time of composition.

Verses 3-6 are thought of as the core of the psalm. God is seen as the ruler of all nations and he rules with justice. Verse 3 says, "May the peoples praise you O God." The same idea is used as a message for the "nations." Notice that "peoples" and "nations" are plural rather than singular indicating not simply a people or the nation of Israel but all of the nations and peoples of the world. When such justice and equity are accomplished the nations will be glad and sing for joy.

The universality of verses 3-5 has caused a few scholars to suppose that this can be thought of as a prophetic psalm. That is to say the psalmist may have been foreseeing a time when the knowledge of God would be universal as prophetically described in Is. 11:9, 45:22, 49:6, 52:10, Hab. 2:14, etc. Each of these has a subtle prophetic message but the original readers would certainly not have considered them prophetic in the New Testament sense.

The true vision of the psalm is expressed in verse 6: "Then the land will yield its harvest and God, our God will bless us." Blessings for the world mean blessings for Israel. The psalmist is probably using the word "harvest" not just in an agricultural sense but incorporating all of the blessings of prosperity. Marvin Tate observes that in the midst of the physical blessings of harvest and prosperity, an important spiritual dimension is introduced in the Aaronic Benediction of verse 1. That is that the face of God shining on the people is the sign of his favor and fellowship. In many places in the Old Testament, particular in the Psalms, the blessings of God are closely linked with the worship of God. (Tate, *op. cit.* on CD.) This theme is carried into the seventh verse also.

Psalm 75

Introduction and Summary

The general structure of this psalm makes it appear that this may have been a composite literary work made up of a group of elements. As a result many scholars believe it does not fit into the traditional type of psalms, *i.e.* Psalms of Community Thanksgiving. Following his introduction in verse 1, the psalmist begins speaking for God. This is a psalm of community thanksgiving as indicated by the first phrase, "*We* give thanks to you O God." There are similarities between this psalm and the prayer of Hannah in I Sam. 2:3, 6-8, and 10. This thesis of the psalm is the power of God to uphold both the cosmic and the moral components of his creation. The psalmist expresses his thanks to God for his eternal power, adding that the arrogant have no such power. Only God can ultimately direct a man and he shows this by exalting one and humbling another. In this way the psalmist exalts the righteous judgment of God.

There are no historical references which would help us date the psalm. The strong condemnation of arrogance condemned by the entire communities may indicate that the psalmist is referring to a national enemy. This has caused some scholars to believe that the psalm may have been composed during the reign of Hezekiah when Sennacherib and the Assyrian army were about to capture Jerusalem. See II Kgs. 18:17-25, 28-35, and 19:5-13. This psalm has also been linked to Psalm 46 and the utterances of Isaiah at the time of Sennacherib's threat. See Is. 37:21-37 and II Kgs. 19:20-35.

The poem divides itself into three sections. Verse 1 introduces the psalm. Verses 2-8 describe God's power and the futility of the arrogant wicked, and verses 9-10 conclude with the poet's affirmation of praise to the God of Jacob.

The superscription on the Psalm is unusual. Not only is it "For the director of music" and "A psalm of Asaph" but it is to the tune, "Do Not Destroy." In Deut. 9:23-26 there is the retelling of the incident which took place at Kadesh-Barnea when God instructed the Israelites to go in and take the Land of Canaan. However, because of the discouraging report of the spies they refused to obey the Lord. In Moses' plea on behalf of the people he said to God, "O sovereign Lord, do not destroy the people." Many scholars believe that this became the opening line of a song which described that event. The tune of that song, "Do Not Destroy," is thought to have been the tune to be used for the singing of Psalm 75.

Commentary

In verse 1 the psalmist introduces his theme by stating the thanksgiving of the community for God's wondrous works. The perfect tense is used in the opening phrase, "We give thanks." The use of the perfect tense indicates that this action (thanking God) was something which began in the past and continues into the present. The expression, "for your Name is near" would have had a very significant meaning to ancient people because the Name of their God was all important to them. See Ex. 3:13-14, Deut. 4:7-8. For the ancient Middle Eastern people a name was more

than just a designation. Instead it conveyed the essential being or essence of the person. Consequently the Name of the Lord reveals his true character. See Jer. 33:2, Amos 5:4-8, 9:6.

In verses 2-3 God is introduced in a somewhat abrupt manner. There is no announcement "This is what the Lord says" or similar statement. This verse expresses a sentiment similar to the answer received by Habakkuk when he questioned God. See Hab. 1:2-4 and 2:2-8. In our psalm the poet pictures God as saying "I choose the appointed time" and God is the one who judges uprightly. Not only is the Lord in charge of the moral character of the universe – the rights and wrongs – he is also is in charge of the material character of the universe upholding it when the earth and all the people quake. The psalmist may have a double idea in mind; one of the material world and another as a description of contemporary life this – one of uncertainty and insecurity. The psalmist says that God choose the appointed time and place for his own intervention.

In verse 4 he turns to the arrogant people telling them to boast no more. To the wicked in verse 5 he says, "Do not lift your horn against heaven." In the ancient world the horn was a symbol of strength, power, and in dignity and it is frequently applied to kings. This symbol is found at number of times in the Old Testament. Consequently the lifting up of one's own horn is synonymous with the idea of arrogance or haughtiness. Cutting off a person's horn is the sign of humiliating judgment. Speaking with an outstretched (stiff) neck was also considered a sign of arrogance.

Once again in verses 6-7 he exalts the sovereignty of the Lord by saying that no man from the east or west or from the desert can lift man up. In some versions the word "promotion" occurs rather than "can lift man up."

In verse 8 the cup of wine in God's of hand is symbolic of God's wrath. There are times when a cup of wine symbolizes a festival life or celebration. However at this point the symbolism is tied to God's wrath as it is in a number of other places in the Bible. One of the most familiar of these is Rev. 14:10. In speaking of the wine mixed with spices the writer is probably referring to a practice in some of the ancient civilizations of mixing spices with wine to make it more intoxicating. The wicked will drink it down to the dregs, that is, completely.

Verse 9 changes the mood. The psalmist speaks of himself in contrast to what he has just described. He says that he will declare this forever and sing the praises of the God of Jacob. His response to the arrogance of the wicked and the fact that they lifted up their horns to heaven is that he will cut off the horns of all the wicked. This is probably the psalmist himself who is speaking although he sees himself as the instrument of God.

Psalm 124

Introduction and Summary

This psalm expresses both individual and community thanksgiving. The statement of verses 1-2 indicate that this psalm is designed as an antiphonal song, *i.e.* one in which the leader speaks or sings and congregation responds in song. History shows us that this was a practice in the very early church, probably being referred to in Eph. 5:19 where Paul says, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." The general tenor of the psalm indicates that the poet is thinking of a time of difficulty and trauma for the community of Israel. Once again we see the combination of thanksgiving and praise as was characteristic of the Hebrew people.

A number of metaphors are used to describe their peril. They could have been swallowed alive (vs. 3), engulfed by a flood (vs. 4), swept away by a torrent (vs. 4), swept away by raging waters (vs. 5), torn apart by wild beasts (vs. 6), or caught like a bird in a snare (vs. 7). Amidst all these perils God has protected them.

Although the superscription speaks of this psalm as "Of David," Rhodes and other scholars believe a language and syntax point to a post exilic date. The expression "Of David" does not necessarily claim Davidic authorship, but it could mean "dedicated to David" or "in honor of David." Verse 3 shows that the nation feared being swallowed up by an enemy which casts doubt on Davidic authorship. Such dangers were not characteristic of David's reign. Because of the trauma of the Exile, the community of returning Israelites could have been reflecting on the possibility that their entire nation could have been destroyed by the Babylonians. Looking back on that possibility perhaps gave rise to the composition of the psalm. On the other, there is very little in the psalm to indicate its precise date of composition.

Commentary

Verse 1 opens with a partial statement in which the presenter invites all Israel to join in his song. Verse 2 restates the content of verse 1 and then describes part of the peril which the nation had undergone. Verses 3-5 speak of the enemy as flood waters that would swallow up the community or like a torrent which would sweep them away. In verse 6 the thanksgiving of the community is mixed with their praise. Here the enemy is spoken of as a beast with terrible teeth which would tear them to pieces.

Verses 7-8 describe their deliverance. The community can now face a future with confidence that just as God has delivered them in the past he will continue to be their helper.

Chapter VIII
Psalms of Individual Thanksgiving

Introduction

Many scholars do not divide the Psalms of Thanksgiving into two different categories, *i.e.* Psalms of Community Thanksgiving and Psalms of Individual Thanksgiving. Instead they deal with them at one classification. In a sense, these two categories of Thanksgiving Psalms are contrasted with Psalms of Individual Lament and Psalms of Community Lament. In fact, the Psalms of Thanksgiving have characteristics of lament as well as gratitude. Some scholars believe that they were used in liturgical ways as part of the worship or accompanying certain sacrifices but we have no concrete information about the actual use of these psalms.

Psalms 9

Induction and Summary

William Taylor says that scholars generally agree that Psalm 9 and Psalm 10 were originally a single Psalm. As they stand in most Hebrew manuscripts they are two separate psalms but in a few of the older manuscripts in the LXX and the Vulgate they appear as one. Three pieces of evidence are generally offered supporting the theory of a single psalm. First, Book I of the Psalter contains forty-one psalms, only four of which are without superscriptions. Psalm 10 is one of those not having a superscription. Second, the word "Selah" never appears at the end of a psalm in Book I but it is found at the end of Psalm 9 perhaps indicating that Psalm 10 is a continuation of Psalm 9. Third, the acrostic structure and pattern of these two psalms when taken together is also said to favor the combination. This however, is open to some criticism because this structure is incomplete and very imperfect. (Taylor, *op. cit.* pp. 53-54.) James Mays says that when these two psalms are taken together they really form a single prayer. "It begins with thanksgiving for the history and salvation in which the Lord has disclosed his reign by his judgment of the nations. It laments the present situation in which nations act with impunity and call the kingdom of God into question. It asks for the intervention of the Lord to judge the nations and deliver the lowly." (Mays, *op. cit.,* p. 72.)

Perowne is among those who object to joining psalms 9 and 10. He says that the acrostic structure of the two psalms only points to the possibility of common authorship but not to their joining as a single psalm. Because of this structure they do not divide themselves by strophe and content but by the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. If these two were originally one psalm, it is difficult to determine why they would have been separated. Scholars also have various theories concerning this.

In most of the English translations the superscription states that the choir is to sing the psalm according to *muth-labben.* The exact meaning of that term is not known but the NIV and a few other versions give a literal translation of this as, "The Death of the Son." Hebrew linguists tell us that a slight variation in the Hebrew letters could cause this to be rendered "By a female."

Both of these psalms abound in the synonymous parallelism. For the most part Psalm 9 is exalting God for the continuous string of victories experienced by the psalmist. Psalm 10 consists primarily of prayers against those who violently shed blood. The poet appears to be speaking in behalf of the community or the nation as well as himself. He expresses thanksgiving to God for the Lord's righteous judgments, the punishment of the wicked, and the defense of the oppressed. This content has caused some scholars to conclude that the psalm(s) was written by David at the conclusion of one of his military exploits. Others say that the acrostic character of the structure indicates a late authorship. Peter Craigie however says, "The use of the acrostic pattern need not imply a late date as sometimes has been argued, though neither does it indicate an early date. . . Probably all that can be claimed with reasonable confidence is that the two psalms come from the time of the monarchy (perhaps as early as the United Monarchy) and that they continued to be used in Israel's worship in the postexilic period and beyond." (Craigie, *op. cit.*) There is little information that points to a distinct time in history.

Commentary

As in many other psalms, verses 1-2 express the psalmist intent to praise God by singing joyfully. Once again we have the extolling of the *Name* of God. A part of the reason for this praise is God's wondrous works. Most scholars believe that the statements are vindications against the false accusations of his enemies. The psalmist uses the personal pronouns in an interesting way. He begins in verses 1-2 speaking in the first person, "I." In verse 4 he begins speaking in the second person, "you." In verse 7 he begins speaking in the third person, "he."

Verses 3-6 list some of God's wondrous works for which the psalmist is praising him. The Lord is the one who has turned back the enemies of the poet and/or the nation. They stumble and perish before the Lord. God has upheld righteousness and the cause of the psalmist. The Lord who sits on his throne judges righteously rebuking the nations and turning back the wicked. He blots out their names forever and ever. Endless ruin overtakes the enemies and the Lord uproots their cities. Even the memory (memorial) of them has perished.

Although these statements sound like the psalmist is referring to national enemies, many scholars believe that these are personal enemies being described as if they were national enemies. He describes the victories over these enemies as the routing of an army and leaving cities in ruins. Verse 4 gives a glimpse into the personal character of these enemies rather than identifying them as national enemies; "You have upheld *my* right and *my* cause." James L. Mays says, "The report of the wonderful deeds begins as an account of personal deliverance from enemies through the action of the Lord as judge (9:3-4). But suddenly the enemies are the wicked nations, and the account of their judgment recalls the Lord's action in the past against the nations who threatened Israel and have passed from history; the prophets and their oracles against the nations are in the background (9:5-6)." (Mays, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.)

Verses 7-10 extol the great characteristics of God. In contrast to the demise of those nations the permanence of the kingship of God is easily seen. The description of the enemies in verses 3-6, appears as a mixture of personal and national characteristics. The thrust of the passage is that Israel's enemies have been vanquished (vs. 7). It may very well be that the poet has both of these in mind and purposely expresses their identity, personal and national, in this way.

The Lord is the God who reigns forever. His judgments are always in righteousness and equity. This however, is not a picture of an eschatological judgment but rather the righteous judgment of God throughout history. It was in these events that God's righteous judgment resulted in the deliverance of the psalmist and the nation. These past experiences give him hope for the future.

In verse 9 the metaphor changes from God as judge to God as refuge. He is the Lord and in him the oppressed find protection and a safe haven. In the original language the word "refuge" literally means a stronghold or a place with high fortifications, thus offering safety. See Is. 25:12 where the same word is used.

Verse 10 tells us that God, as the stronghold and high fortification, is the one in whom you can place your trust. However this protection is limited to "those who know your name." There is a contrast here. The righteous Judge will wipe out the *names* of the wicked as in verse 6 but those

who know the *name* of God have the foundation for trust in him. Once again we see the ancient importance of the name of God. Jews, both ancient and modern, hold this name in the deepest reverence, and will not profane it by pronouncing it. Out of reverence for the sacred name the Masorets, when copying the Old Testament Scriptures, would not write the name of God with a pen freshly dipped in ink.

In verses 11-12 he invites others to join him in praising God. There are reasons for praising Him. The Lord is the one who is enthroned in Zion. The expression "king who is enthroned in Zion" may be speaking of the king of Israel or of God himself since God's Name is spoken of as dwelling in the Temple. He is proclaimed among the nations for what he has done. He is the avenger of blood, and he does not ignore the afflicted ones who cry to him. Here, as in many other psalms, we have a dual picture of God. God is the destroyer of those he finds guilty but to those who trust in him he is their sure defense. His perfect justice moves in both directions. Therefore the psalmist issues an invitation to the faithful to join in their praise of the Lord.

In verses 13-14 the psalmist utters a prayer in his own behalf. He prays for deliverance from the affliction caused by his enemies. These afflictions had brought him close to "the gates of death." Some commentators believe that this is the king speaking rather than the psalmist. The reason behind this request is that he wants to declare the praises of God "in the gates of the Daughter of Zion." The expression, "Daughter of Zion," is frequently used as an identification of Jerusalem, *e.g.* II Kgs. 19:21, Is. 1:8, Jer. 4:31, etc. The gates of the cities were generally considered the place of public discourse and discussion. Justice was also frequently meted out at the gates of the city. William Taylor however believe that "the gates of the city" refers to the city itself – "within the gates of the city" rather than the location of gates themselves. A contrast is intended here between "the gates of death," expressing hopelessness, and "the gates of the daughter of Zion," expressing security.

Verse 15 speaks on the enemies who have dug pits and set snares for others. However these enemies fell into their own pits and were caught by their own snares. In some of the ancient law codes, particularly the Code of Hammurabi, the punishment for one who unjustly sought evil against another was to suffer the penalty which he sought for his victim. One who committed perjury in order to entrap another suffered the punishment which he tried to bring on his victim.

In verse 16 we see another contrast. "The Lord is known by his justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands." Verses 17-18 show the destiny of the wicked. They will be returned to the grave – sheol – along with all the nations that forget God. On the other hand the needy will not be forsaken forever and the hope of the afflicted will not perish. In this context the word "needy" is synonymous with the idea of those who are "afflicted." Peter Craigie says that this might not be referring to the absence of wealth or the life of poverty but to the righteous servants of God who have been unjustly treated by evil people. They expect God's divine intervention. (Craigie, *op. cit.*)

In verses 19-20 the psalmist calls on God to arise and judge the nations. Do not allow evil men to triumph. Instead, "Let the nations be judged in your presence. Strike them with terror O Lord; let the nation's know they are but men."

Psalm 10

Introduction and Summary

When we look at the first verse and Psalm 10 it is easy to see the connection with the previous psalm. However, as previously noted, some commentators believe that these are two entirely separate psalms. Each of these hypotheses has credible arguments favoring them but nothing conclusive can be said for either one.

In Psalms 10 the psalmist is chastising God for what he feels is God's neglect in punishing the wicked. Not only are men doing wicked acts but they are boasting of their evil deeds and no justice appears to be rendered by the Lord. Instead, in their violence and deceit these wicked men continued to prosper. Nevertheless, the psalm concludes with a triumphant declaration that the Lord is King forever and ever and all of the evil nations will perish from his land. The Lord is entreated to listen to the prayers of the afflicted, the fatherless, and the oppressed.

The psalm has three main divisions. Verses 1-11 introduce the complaints of the psalmist followed by his description of the evils of the wicked. Verses 12-15 present an appeal to God to arise and avenge those who had been oppressed. Verses 16-18 declare the victory of the Lord.

Commentary

In verse 1 the psalmist calls on the Lord for action asking, "Why O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" This introduces a subject which was not addressed in the Psalm 9. The psalmists feel that God is not acting as quickly or decisively as the psalmist desires or expects. He seems to be thinking that God is almost an idle spectator rather than the sovereign of the universe. In a number of psalms the writers have expressed these ideas. See Ps. 13:1, 22:1, 42:9, and 43:2. See also the book of Habakkuk. The idea of God hiding his face or hiding his eyes is that the Lord is apparently showing no concern or he is not pleased with the actions of his own people. In Is. 59:1-2 we have a similar idea although in that passage God is closing his eyes because of the sins of the people. That is, he is paying no attention to their pleas because of the barrier of sin which stands between God and man.

In verses 2-11 the psalmist develops his complaint by listing many of the faults of the evil ones. Among these faults are: arrogance, hunting down the weak, using divisive schemes, boasting in their lustful hearts, greed, pride, thoughts which have no room for God, disregard for God's law, overconfident self-reliance, a mouth full of curses, lies, and threats, ambush and murder of the innocent, and waiting like a lion lies in wait to catch the helpless. In addition he belittles God saying that God has forgotten because he covers his face and never sees.

In this psalm we have one of the longest descriptions of evil people found anywhere in the Bible. It is important to notice that in spite of all of the evil described by the psalmist along with his

bewilderment concerning God's lack of immediate action, his faith remains strong and he continues to praise God. Some commentators consider this long description of evil to be characteristic of the ruling class or the wealthy elite among their own nation. Some others believe these are personal enemies, and some believe they are evil nations.

In this description, we see how evil men disregard the dignity of their fellows. This is one of the dangers of arrogance and pride. By boasting of the desires of his heart the wicked man reveals his true character which is evil to its core. Contrast this with Paul's statement of his own desire found in Rom. 10:1. "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved."

In verse 3 the writer tells us how greed causes one to revile the Lord and in verse 4 he says that pride keeps the evil man from seeking the Lord because in his thoughts there is no room for God. Some commentators refer to him as a "practicing atheist" though probably not a convinced atheist. (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: An Introduction and Commentator* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), on CD.) Though his ways may be always prosperous his arrogance causes him to set aside God's law (verse 5). In verse 6 he says this evil person lives by two mottos. First, "Nothing can shake me." Second, "I will always be happy and nothing bad will come to me." The two problems which the psalmist sees here are first, that the wicked deserve to be shaken but they are not, and second, they do not deserve happiness, yet they have it. There appears to be no justice!

The key is that the evil man described in Psalm 10 is living under the delusion that he is free when he is actually a slave to his own lusts (desires). In Psalms 10 and also Lk. 12:13-21 the arrogance and self sufficiency of the wicked (or any "self-sufficient" person) cause him to deny the power and sovereignty of God (verse 11). Reduced to simpler terms, we need to look at the New Testament concept of the slavery of sin and the freedom (liberty) in Christ. In John 8:34 Jesus says that those who sin are slaves of sin, and those who obey enjoy freedom and liberty. The world says the opposite. Those who live any way they want to live – without any moral or ethical restraints and without the obligations of the discipline of Christ's commandments – are completely free to live as they choose. They have "liberty." On the other hand, those who place themselves under the strict discipline of Christ are slaves. They are not free to live as they please.

In verse 7 the psalmist says that the mouth of the wicked is the full of curses. In the LXX the word translated "curse" is αρα (*ara*) literally meaning "a prayer of evil intervention." The Old Testament has a number of words in Hebrew which are translated "curse," each having a slightly different emphasis. (Mounce, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-152), and (Johan Lust and Erik Eynikel, *Greek English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Revised Edition, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 2003), p. 80.) In Ps. 10:7 the emphasis seems to be that this evil person prays for terribly evil things to happen to others.

Verses 8-10 envision these enemies moving into small villages lying in wait and threatening the helpless occupants, having no regard for even innocent children. He is as vicious as a lion waiting to attack its prey or a hunter waiting to snare an animal in his net. He crushes his victims and they fall.

Verse 11 summarizes his attitude toward God. God, in the mind of that evil man, is stupid and uncaring. He forgets both his promises in his warnings, and he covers his eyes, refusing to look on the plight of his children, or he is afraid to look. In essence the arrogance of the wicked man has led him to the point of denying the power of God (verse 11).

Verses 12-15. Having stated all of these evil characteristics he moves toward a solution by asking God to respond to all of this evil. The expression, "Arise, O Lord," was probably an ancient battle cry of Israel as in Num. 10:35 and in Ps. 17:13 but it also appears in some non-military contexts asking for the Lord to come to the aid and assistance of his people in other perils. See II Chron. 6:41, Ps. 3:7, 7:6, 73:20, and 132:8. In verse 12 there appears to be a contrast between the Lord's treatment of the helpless and the evil one's treatment of the helpless described in verses 8-9.

This language is framed in a way that it seems to call on God to defend his honor among the nations. He is a God of mercy, compassion, and justice. Therefore he must demonstrate these characteristics to his enemies because he is a God who intervenes in behalf of those who are in trouble and have grief. The victims have put their trust in him because he is the helper of the fatherless and the oppressed (verse 14). Therefore the Lord must "break the arm of the wicked and evil man," verse 15.

In verses 16-18 the psalmist extols God as the one who is King forever and ever, who is the desire of the afflicted, the one who listens to their cry. All this is done in order that a man might not be terrified by evil. Verses 17 and 18 reaffirm the confidence and trust that the psalmist feels. He is certain that the Lord will respond to his petition.

Psalm 30

Introduction and Summary

Arnold B. Rhodes refers to this as one of the best illustrations in the Psalms of thanksgiving of an individual. (Rhodes, *op. cit.,* p. 60.) From the psalmist's statement in verses 2-3 it appears that this psalm was written in thanksgiving for the restoration of his health. This appears to have been a very serious illness and the psalmist was afraid that he might die. His gratitude to the Lord is vividly displayed in the beautiful language of this psalm as he calls on all who have known God's loving kindness to join in this thanksgiving.

The superscription says that the psalm was written for the dedication of "the house of David." The NIV uses the word "temple" rather than "house" but linguists tell us that the Hebrew can be translated by either of these words. Perowne raises the question of what house is being referenced. Some understand this to mean the land on which the temple was finally erected by Solomon but others believe that it is referring to the dedication of the rebuilt temple at the time of the return from exile. We actually have no way of determining the time or the authorship of the psalm.

The Talmud tells us that this psalm began to be used in later Judaism on the anniversary of the rededication of the Jerusalem temple. In the New Testament this is referred to as the Feast of Dedication (Jn. 10:22). While Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) ruled Syria (175-164 B.C.) his army captured the city of Jerusalem. In 164 B.C. the army of Judas Maccabeus recaptured that portion of the city where the temple was located. In the book of I Maccabees we have the statement of the origin of the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah). "Then Judas [Maccabeus] and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of the dedication of the altar should be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev." (I Macc. 4:59) When referring to the recitation of Ps. 32 during the annual celebration of Hanukkah, Arnold B. Rhodes says, "The Jewish community thought of itself as repeating the experiences of the psalmist in its suffering under Antiochus Epiphanes and its deliverance under the Maccabees." (Rhodes, *op. cit.,* p. 61.)

The psalm divides itself into two basic parts. Verses 1-5 express thanksgiving for recovery from the psalmist's illness. Verses 6-12 give more details about this experience. Both of these sections are filled with synonymous parallelism.

Commentary

Verse 1 shows that the psalmist has been injured by his enemies and the Lord lifted him up out of the depths. We do not know what the injury might have been but its seriousness is evident. The expression "lifted me up" has caused a few to suppose that this was really spoken of Jeremiah being lifted out of the dungeon. This is generally considered to be highly speculative and there's no evidence of such a parallel.

In verses 2-3 the poet says that he cried to the Lord for help and the Lord healed him. The parallel statement in verse 3 says, "You brought me from the grave" and "you spared me from going down into the pit." Most translations read, "You brought *my soul* from the grave" but the NIV reads, "You brought *me* from the grave." In the LXX the word ψυχη (*psuchē*) occurs here and it is translated "soul" in most English versions. However the translators of the NIV probably had in mind that the word in Greek means the whole self. It is not simply another word for "spirit" (πνευμα – *pneuma*) as it is frequently considered. Instead, it refers to the whole person. The word translated "grave" is frequently translated "sheol" and in the LXX the word αδης (*hades*) is used here. It means the unseen or spirit world. In almost all English translations of the New Testament this word is translated "hades" but the KJV usually translates it "hell." That translation has caused a good bit of confusion and misunderstanding. In the LXX the word which is translated "pit" is λακκος (*lakkos*) the common word for prison dungeon. This is thought by some scholars to be part of sheol but this idea is not contained in the word itself. In poetic license the words may be used interchangeably in this synonymous parallelism.

Verses 4-5 create a sort of climax to this first section. The psalmist calls on all of the saints to praise the holy name of the Lord. In verse 5 he mentions the past anger of the Lord. Many commentators believe that this indicates that the psalmist thought that his suffering came because of God's anger at his disobedience. This is highly speculative but there can be little doubt that the psalmist had experienced God's anger for a short time. In contrast to this he says that the Lord's loving kindness lasts a lifetime. As a parallel to this the poet says, "Weeping may remain for a night but rejoicing comes in the morning." (Ps. 30:5.)

In verses 6-12 the psalmist rehearses his autobiography, reviewing his mistakes in the past and once again expressing gratitude to God. In his prosperity he had a false sense of security which led him to believe that he would never be shaken. A similar statement is found in Ps. 10:6 where an evil man said, "Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble." The phrase is also used in Ps. 15:5, 62:2, and 112:6. Arrogance leads to a false sense of independence and security. Verses 6-7 are tied together in contrast. First the psalmist speaks of his own arrogance and then he speaks of God's grace in rescuing him. God had provided the resources for the psalmist's security but the psalmist allowed those things to become a source of pride. The result was that God hid his face and this became a source of his trouble.

In verse 8 the writer comes face to face with himself and recognizes the vacuum which he had created because he had refused to have the Lord in his life. This became a matter of life and death for him. However this was not centered simply on the psalmist but it was centered on his praise of God. In verse 9 we see an interesting exchange and the contrast between the laments and thanksgiving of the poet. In his troubles it seems that he has not completely lost a sense of praise, and this, at least in part, empowered him to return to the Lord. Speaking, of his possible death he asks, "Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?"

In verse 10 he returns to the Lord asking for mercy and help. His arrogance has been replaced by humility and his self sufficiency has been replaced by his cry for help. In verse 11 the psalmist recalls the Lord's response. "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and closed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent." His lamentation gave

way to singing and his sackcloth of mourning was replaced by festal garments. In verse 12 the psalmist says that his gratitude to the Lord will go on forever.

Psalm 32

Introduction and Summary

There are seven psalms in the Psalter which are usually referred to as penitential psalms. These are Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. In these psalms the poet is almost always speaking of specific sin in his own life. They have been included in various categories. Some scholars classify them as Wisdom Psalms and others classify them as Psalms of Individual Thanksgiving. With the exception of Ps. 32, which is usually classified a Psalm of Individual Thanksgiving most scholars classified them as Psalms of Individual Laments. Perowne says that Augustine, shortly before his death, frequently read this psalm weeping as he read it. He also wrote the psalm on the wall near his bed. (Perowne, *op. cit.*, p. 289.)

The superscription above this psalm states: "Of David. *A Maskil.*" The term *Maskil* occurs in the superscript of thirteen different palms but the exact meaning of the term is not clear and there is no general agreement among scholars concerning it. Paul quotes the psalm in Rom. 4:7-8 where he attributes it to David. William Taylor rejects both the superscription and Paul's statement stating that the nature and the wisdom content of the psalm indicate a late date of composition. However he does not attempt to assign any date for its composition. (Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 169.) Perowne, on the other hand, defends the Davidic authorship of the psalm. David had struggled with sin as specifically identified by his sin with Bathsheba. In Psalms 51, which was ascribed to David after he was confronted by Nathan the prophet, we have a vivid moving description of sin and guilt. Psalm 32 reflects the joy of forgiveness. (Perowne, *op. cit.*, p. 289.)

The psalm divides itself into three sections. First is the expression of the blessedness of the penitent sinner, verses 1-2. Second there is the acknowledgement and forgiveness of sin, verses 3-7. Third there is the wisdom and joy of the righteous, verses 8-11.

Commentary

Chronologically the psalm was written upside down. The psalm begins – verses 1-2 – with the conclusion which the psalmist reached following his experience with evil. Later in the psalm he will describe the agony of his own guilt in contrast to the blessedness of forgiveness. The synonymous parallelism of these two verses describes the transgressions which are forgiven and the sins which are covered. This is followed by the statement of the blessing to the man whose sin of the Lord does not hold against him. (On the meaning of "blessed" see various previous chapters.)

A misunderstanding of verses 1-2 has led to some controversy particularly among some conservative Protestant churches. Some believe that these verses underscore the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, commonly referred to as the impossibility of apostasy. Others say it is possible for a person to reach "sanctification" at which time he will be empowered to live a life above sin and therefore God does not count his misdeeds against him. Both of these misinterpretations come from a misunderstanding of the meaning of grace and forgiveness. Paul emphasizes this in his use of the passage in Rom. 4:7-8 where he shows that God's grace places

Christians in a state or crucible of secure salvation or forgiveness. However Paul also teaches that an individual can leave – fall from – that state of grace or salvation.

Three very important words are used in verses 1-2 to describe human evil. These words are "transgressions," "sins," and "iniquities." Each of these has a specific and important meaning in the Biblical doctrine of sin and forgiveness. Peter Craigie says that "transgression" is an act of rebellion against God, "sin" generally refers to the turning away from the true path or missing the mark or target, and "iniquity" generally refers to disrespect for that which is divine or holy. It is sometimes related to criminal distortion. Craigie also mentions that these words along with the expressions "forgiven," "covered," and "the Lord does not count his sins against him" are used in poetic structure as synonymous parallelism basically encompassing the whole of human evil and the completeness of God's forgiveness. The individual characteristics of these expressions should not be over-emphasized in the psalm. (Craigie, *op. cit.*)

We must not miss the blessedness of the passage. Not only is human evil described in a three-fold manner but the restoration of a relationship with God is also described with completeness and clarity. Repentance and confession of sin are presupposed in this but see verse 5b. The word "forgive" carries the basic idea of "sending away or remitting." The word "cover" means to hide something with a veil or a cloak so that it can no longer be seen. The expression "the Lord does not count his sins against him" is a sort of summary of these two ideas. The statement in Jer. 31:34, quoted in Heb. 8:12, probably expresses the idea of very well, *i.e.* "I will remember their sins no more." The writer of Hebrews is particularly referring to the constant reminders of sin in the various sacrifices of the Law, particularly on the Day of Atonement. This is the essence of salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8).

Verses 3-7 constitute a rather lengthy confession of the sins of the psalmist. In verses 3-4 he expresses the weight of guilt which was bearing down on him prior to the confession of his sins. He states this in physical terms showing what we would call today a psychosomatic illness *i.e.*, a physical illness which has a psychological basis rather than a physiological basis. His guilty conscience has devastated him physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

The psalmist emphasizes that turning back to God in time of trouble is not true repentance. Reformation of life is not true repentance. There must be the experience of grief and devastation coming from one's own guilt and a change of heart which moves one back to God. James Mays expresses it is effectively: "Confession is the knocking to which the door opens, the seeking that finds, the asking that receives. Confession to God is confession of faith in God." (Mays, *op. cit.*, p. 147.)

Verse 4 has an interesting expression which has been construed by some commentators to mean that the psalmist was running a high fever. "My strength was sacked as in the heat of summer" (NIV). This statement is also translated "My moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (KJV) and "My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer." (NASV). The symbolic statement simply indicate that the psalmist struggled as he tried to avoid facing his sins and confess them to God. Few of us would be willing to make the same statement about our own conviction of guilt.

Verse 5 describes the experience of refreshing when the psalmist resolves to come face to face with his own sins and confess them to the Lord. His relief came when he experienced God's willingness to forgive. This section gives us excellent insight concerning the comfort of forgiveness but we must remember that this comfort only comes when we have experienced a genuine feeling of guilt, of humbly confessing our sins to the Lord, and asking for his forgiveness.

In verse 6 the poet concludes that every godly person should pray to the Lord and experience his forgiveness, adding the phrase "while you may be found." It appears that the psalmist is indicating that the grace of God may someday be unavailable. He expresses this as mighty waters rising when the sinner will no longer be able to reach the Lord. In contrast to this the psalmist sees God as his hiding place and the one who protects him, and surrounds him with songs of deliverance.

Verses 8-11 form the concluding section speaking of the wisdom and the joy of righteousness. In verse 8 one wonders if the psalmist is speaking of his own instruction to others or of God's instruction to the psalmist. Commentators are divided on this. The thrust of the passage is simply this: when a sinner has the burden of sin forgiven through repentance, confession, and God's forgiveness he is anxious to share this good news with his fellow man.

Verse 9 however, gives a stern warning. One's confession is not to be the sample uttering of words as if you were a dumb animal – a horse or a mule – going through the motions because you have a bridle in your mouth.

Verses 10-11 speak of the many sorrows of the wicked contrasted with the joys of those who come to know God. Therefore, one should rejoice in the Lord, sing, and be glad. This is a total of all that he has said in this psalm.

Chapter IX
Psalms of Trust

Introduction

Gunkel and other scholars consider Psalms of Trust a subcategory of Psalms of Individual Lament. One of the major reasons for this is that they begin with an appeal to or an affirmation of the protection of God. Many of the Psalms have characteristics of more than one type and scholars differ about their classification. In this general category we have Psalms of Individual Trust (Psalms 11, 16, 23, 62, 91, 121, and 131) and Psalms of Community Trust (115, 125, and 129). In our study we will look only at Psalms of Individual Trust, Ps. 11, 16, and 23. Some of the characteristics which these psalms share become evident as we read and study them. The psalmist is sometimes speaking of his own peril but he concludes – and frequently begins – with a phrase in which he expresses thanksgiving to God for his protection and security; *e.g.* Ps. 11 and 23. The Psalms of Trust sometimes express the sentiment of community and at other times the sentiments of the individual. The peril and the deliverance which they experience are real, not symbolic. In these psalms there is usually a strong affirmation of faith. The trust described by the psalmist is unshakable.

Generally speaking the enemies described in the Psalms of Trust are not specified or well defined. They are usually described simply as wicked men or evil doers. Some believe they may be foreign political powers while others believe they are the oppressors of the poor. This would probably have been applied to the wealthy.

Psalm 11

Introduction and Summary

Peter Craigie refers to this psalm as "an individual *song of confidence*." (Craigie, *op. cit.,* on CD.) It describes the presence of enemies contrasting them with the holiness of God. Consistently the psalmist flees to the Lord for refuge and strength. We cannot identify the enemies because the psalmist's description of them is broad and general. In the midst of all of this there is a strong affirmation of the faith of the psalmist. In verse 1, after he has affirmed his refuge in God he asks, "How can you say to me, 'Flee like a bird to your mountain?'" It is not the righteous but the wicked who have reason to fear and flee. Perowne holds to the Davidic authorship of the psalm but he does not assign a specific time of writing. He believes that it was probably written between the time of Saul's pursuit of David and the time of Absalom's rebellion. (Perowne, *op. cit.,* p. 171.) The psalm is a contrast between faith and fear. An important message is that the absence of trust – confidence – may contribute to one's life disintegrating into fear and anxiety. This confidence however, is not self confidence but confidence in God. Trust in God can lead to healthy self confidence but not arrogance and pride.

Some scholars believe that the psalm had a liturgical use and that it was associated with the temple worship. Although this is somewhat speculative, the superscription indicates that it was "For the director of music" which may imply liturgical use.

The psalm divides itself into two basic sections. First there is a statement of faith which some commentators believe also contains a note of despair (verses 1-3); second, there is the restoration (and declaration) of confidence (verses 4-7).

Commentary

Verse 1 begins with a statement which has been variously interpreted as faith and despair. Is he *seeking* refuge in God and expressing his need for God or is he expressing gratitude for God's presence? Verse 4 may indicate that the psalmist is seeking God in the temple. Delitzsch, holding to the Davidic authorship, favors the time of rebellion of Absalom as the time of composition. He pictures David as the psalmist who has received counsel from a friend advising him to "flee to the mountains." David consider this advice, though well intended, to be founded on fear and he responds accordingly. (Keil, C.F. and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, The Psalms.* Vol. 5 of 10 volumes, (New Updated Edition, Electronic Database: Hendrickson Publishers), 1966, CD.)

Is his opening statement, that he has found refuge in the Lord, the psalmist uses the perfect tense which refer to something that began in the past and continues into the present. His confidence in the Lord is not just his past experience, but it is a present reality. The psalmist's counselors are concerned for his safety but the psalmist himself is concerned for what is right in God's sight. We are reminded of John's statement in I Jn. 5:4 that it is our faith that overcomes the

world not the protection of the mountains or a stronghold. Perowne however, believes that there may be a link between this passage and I Sam. 26:20 where David says to Saul that the king was hunting him as one would hunt a partridge in a mountain.

In verse 2 the psalmist begins to describe his enemies. They bend their bows, they aim their arrows, and they are ready to shoot those who are upright in heart. Verse 3 asks an interesting question. "When the foundations are being destroyed what can the righteous do?" Many commentators believe that this question is being asked by the enemy who believes that he has the upper hand in the battle as if to say to the poet, "You are fighting for a lost cause. Righteousness has nothing to offer in a conflict or in a battle." Sometimes righteous people are thought of as weak and helpless when they warn that the moral, ethical, and theological foundations of society are beginning to crumble and that these are the cause of the nation's peril. The strategy of some is to retreat to the mountain but not so for this psalmist. The language expresses in poetic beauty the crisis which the psalmist is experiencing.

In verse 4 he states his strategy in another way. "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne." This may be thought of as the restoration of trust or the declaration of confident faith. The message is that one's confidence must rest on the recognition that God is sovereign, he is in his temple, and he is on his throne. This appears to be another way of saying that God is among his people but he is also ruling from heaven. The psalmist's faith in God is the basis of his optimism. The Lord is in a position to see all that is going on. "He observes the sons of man; his eyes examined them."

In many English translations verse 4 mentions that the eyelids of Lord try or test the children of men. Peter Craigie says that the word translated "eyelids" is used in the context of synonymous parallelism with "his eyes." When we encounter synonymous parallelism the second statement is usually balancing the first statement. (Craigie, *op. cit.*, on CD.) Delitzsch explains this by saying that the eyes give "a fixed and penetrating look that sees into a thing to the foundation of its inmost nature. The mention of the eyelids is intentional. When we observe a thing closely or ponder over it, we draw the eyelids together, in order that our vision may be more concentrated and direct, and become, as it were, one ray piercing through the object." (Delitzsch, *op. cit.*)

In verse 5 he again draws a contrast between the righteous and wicked. The righteous will be examined but the Lord hates the wicked and those who love violence. Notice that the word "examine" occurs in both verses 4 and 5, one referring to the examination of the wicked and the other referring to the examination of the righteous. In verse 5 the psalmist represents God as saying that he hates those who are wicked and those who love violence. This is a very strong expression. We usually say that God loves the sinner but he hates the sin and we defend this with Jn. 3:16 or Rom. 6:17, etc. However in verse 5 of our psalm and elsewhere in the Bible, particular the Old Testament, we have this strong language concerning evil people.

Verse 6 says that the Lord will rain down fiery coals and burning sulfur on those violent enemies. "A scorching wind will be their lot." The idea of scorching winds would have been very familiar to the people of Palestine for they were used to the hot winds which blew across the desert to the east and south.

Verse 7 says that the Lord is righteous and the loves justice; upright men will see his face." In this poetic language the psalmist confidently sees his deliverance.

Psalm 16

Introduction and Summary

The superscription accompanying this psalm states, "A miktam of David." Once again we are faced with the fact that the meaning of a word in the superscription is unknown. Various theories have been advanced concerning the meaning of "miktam." Some believe (a) it is a silent prayer. Others believe (b) it was a description of David, humble and blameless. Some others believe (c) it was a sort of atonement psalm. Many other theories have also been advocated.

William Taylor and some other scholars believe that the psalm is post-exilic in its origin. He offers three reasons, two of which are mentioned here: (a) the influence of the Aramaic language in verses 5-6 and (b) the influence of the wisdom style of the psalmist. (Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 82.) It is generally believed that this style of writing poetry developed in the postexilic period and therefore was not used in earlier periods. However, this theory has very little objective evidence. In Acts 2:25 Peter attributes this psalm to David, and there is very little reason to doubt this.

In general terms this is considered a Psalm of Trust. Scholars, however differ as to whether this is a Psalm of Trust written in the midst of dangers or was it written after the psalmist had been delivered from danger. Verse 1 could imply a prayer asking for deliverance from danger or a prayer of thanksgiving for deliverance already experienced.

Delitzsch believes that the psalmist is in danger of death and that verse 1 is his appeal for safety. This however does not seem to be a necessary conclusion. Instead, the psalmist appears to be expressing a devoted appeal to God to *continue* to keep him safe. Compare Ps. 23:4 where the poet says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Neither Ps. 16 nor Ps. 23 necessarily implies the danger of death but both can be seen as simple affirmations of God's nearness and his protection.

The psalmist is delighted with the holy ones (saints) of Israel but he expresses sorrow for those who have gone after other gods. Many commentators believe these are syncretists, *i.e.* those who tried to combine the worship of the Lord with the worship of other gods (verses 3-4). The prophets attacked those practices frequently. We must remember that an important characteristic of Israel's idolatry was syncretism. The Lord then became just one more god in the pantheon. The psalmist then affirms the goodness of God who has provided him with "my portion and my cup" (verses 5-6).

Verses 7-11 provide an interesting combination of the *Sitz em Leben* – the life setting – described in the psalm and predictive prophecy as interpreted by Peter in Acts 2. In this section the psalmist expresses his confidence in the Lord for the preservation of his life. On Pentecost Peter made a very different application of the psalm, showing that its deeper meaning applies to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. See comments on these verses below.

Commentary

Verse 1 raises the question, "In this opening prayer about protection is the psalmist referring to an imminent danger or is he thinking of the Lord's deliverance from a past danger?" Scholars are divided on this question. Ronald Murphy believes that the psalmist may be thinking of the temple as his place of refuge because it is the dwelling place of the name of God. (Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 578.) On the other hand most scholars believe that this is simply an expression of the thoughts of his heart as a spiritual experience. The ideas of trust in the Lord and fellowship with him are the essence of the psalmist's life. Taking refuge in the Lord or making the Lord the source of one's security is a frequent theme in the Psalms. In a sense the remainder of this psalm is an explanation of the prayer of verse 1. Verse 2 is a continuation of this expression of gratitude and trust as the psalmist says that apart from the Lord he has no good thing.

In verse 3 he expresses his delight over the holy ones (saints) in the land. The Greek word αγιους (*hagious*) is used in verse 3 in the LXX. In the New Testament it is generally translated "saint" but its literal meaning is "holy one." The LXX sometimes uses the word οσιος (*hosios*) which is translated "holy one" or "saint" but its emphasis is usually on righteous behavior rather than "the setting apart for a holy use" which characterizes αγιους (*hagious*). There are exceptions to this as is seen in its use in verse 10 where οσιος (*hosios*) occurs and is translated "Holy One." The word "saint" occurs over thirty times in the English translation of the Old Testament but it comes from three different original (Hebrew) words. One of these words emphasizes personal piety and the other two emphasize separation for a holy use. The word used here emphasizes separation for a holy use.

In verse 4 the poet is going to use these "saints" in contrast to those who have left the Lord and have combined the worship of God with the worship of pagan deities. The sorrows of those who have left the Lord will increase but the psalmist will not take part in their libations of blood. In this the psalmist is affirming that his trust is not polytheistic but is monotheistic. This was seen when the syncretists among the Israelites tried to combine the worship of the Lord with the worship of the Canaanitish or other pagan gods such as Baal, Molech, or the Ashtoreth. Some of the pagan gods were worshipped on the rooftops of the houses and some were referred to as "the starry hosts." See Deut. 4:15-20, II Kgs. 17:16, 21:3, 23:12, Jer. 19:13, and Zeph. 1:5. In our text this is probably a general statement meant to include all of the false gods. The psalmist will have nothing to do with this kind of worship. The sorrows of all who leave the Lord will increase but the psalmist vows not to take part in their bloody libations. Perowne says that this refers to the bloody rites associated with the worship of Molech and Chemosh, both of whom were worshipped by the Moabites and the Canaanites. The blood being spoken of therefore was probably from human sacrifices, primarily infants. (Perowne, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-193.) This psalmist will not even profane his lips by uttering the names of those gods.

In verse 5 he praises the Lord who has assigned him his portion and given him his cup. The words "portion" and "cup" are symbolic. The word translated "portion" means one's allotted part or share in something. The psalmist is thankful that God has given him his part, probably referring to God's covenant promises in the allocation of the land of Canaan. The word cup usually stands for the necessities of life or one's daily food. A parallel idea can be seen in the Ps. 23:5, "my cup overflows," referring to the totality of God's blessings. William Taylor adds that

this is a metaphor drawn from the practice of passing wine to a guest at a feast or a meal. In that context it referred to the status of the guest. The word finally took on the meaning one's destiny. Jesus used the expression in this way when he was referring to his own death, Matt. 20:23 and 26:39. (Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124). Building on this idea the psalmist says that the Lord had made his lot secure. The word "lot" is used frequently to describe one's whole situation in life.

Verse 6 uses the expression "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places." This is referring to the ancient custom of marking a plot of land by using a measuring line. The poet may be speaking of the allocation of the various sections of the land as described in Joshua 13-19 but he is probably speaking of his own place of security in his relationship with the Lord.

Verses 7-11 form a separate block which begins with an expression of praise as the poet reflects on the goodness of God in his life. It is important that we try to see the meaning of the passage in the mind of the psalmist and also the message as it would have been understood by the original recipients or hearers of these lines. In gratitude to God the poet places the Lord always before his face. "I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken." This is, first of all, his supreme expression of confidence in the Lord. Based on this the psalmist has every reason to rejoice. The word "heart" in verse 7 is literally "kidneys." In this verse the Septuagint has the Greek word νεφρος (*nephros*) which also means "kidney." The ancient Israelites and other cultures considered the kidneys as the seat of certain emotions. Most cultures today use the word heart. Both of these are symbolic since neither the physical kidneys nor the physical heart is the seat of the emotions.

Some commentators believe that the expression in verse 8, "I will not be shaken [moved]," is a simple statement of security. Others believe that it means, "I will not die." Some therefore think that the psalmist may have been in great danger. His consolation and security are in the fact that the Lord is by his side and he will not be abandoned to the grave – Sheol. In some of the older versions, *e.g.* the KJV, this is translated "hell" but that is not the sense of the word. He is not speaking of place of torment but rather the unseen world. In the LXX the Greek word αδης (*hadēs*) appears in this verse. From the point of view of the psalmist he is saying that God will not forsake him, but that he will survive even the threats of his enemies.

In verse 10 the LXX has the word οσιος (*hosios*) translated "Holy One." In the RSV this is translated the "godly one." The word occurs in the New Testament only eight times referring primarily to a righteous person so it is frequently used in connection with δικαιος (*dikaios*) meaning righteous or just. This is the word used by Peter in Acts 2:27 where he quotes this passage in his Pentecost sermon. No doubt the psalmist was referring to himself as he wrote this text.

Verse 11 appears as a contrast to verse 10. In verse 10 he said that God would not abandon him to the grave, and in verse 11 he says God will make known to him the path of life and fill him with joy and pleasure for evermore. The psalmist is not speaking of his resurrection from the dead but of his survival. Perowne makes this observation: "It seems impossible to suppose that David, who here expresses such a fullness of confidence in God, such a living personal relationship to Him, could have ever dreamed that such a relationship would end with death. In this

psalm, and in the next, there shines forth the bright hope of everlasting life." (Perowne, *op. cit.*, p. 195.) It appears however that Perowne is injecting too much into the passage, reading it from a New Testament viewpoint rather than considering its basic setting in the Old Testament. On the other hand, we must also keep in mind the teaching of Jesus when he confronted the Sadducees in Matt. 22:31-32: "But about the resurrection of the dead — have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Ps. 16:8-11 in Acts 2:25-28

In Peter's Pentecost sermon, Acts 2:14-39, he declared that God had raised Jesus from the dead (verse 24) and he quotes from Ps. 16:8-11 in support of his statement. We must conclude then that the psalm has a twofold meaning, *i.e.*, one which was confined to the original recipients, and another as a future predictive or illustrative application given by a New Testament writer. New Testament writers frequently used the Old Testament in this way. First, there is a sense in which the content of the psalm applies to the psalmist himself, as we have already seen but according to Peter it has a fuller Messianic meaning. The psalmist, in speaking of himself mentioned his security in the Lord. At this point Peter calls David a prophet saying that the psalmist could not have been speaking literally of himself because he had died and his tomb was still with them. The alternative for Peter was that David was really predicting the resurrection of someone, *i.e.* Jesus Christ. Peter's audience certainly had no explanation for the empty tomb of Jesus, and even the Roman guard was told to lie about it (Matt. 28:11-15). Peter makes his case on the fact that the body of Jesus was not in its tomb, and therefore did not decay. This, Peter says, is affirmed or illustrated by the statement which he quotes from Ps. 16:8-11. When referring to the dual meaning of verses 8-11 Peter Craigie makes this statement:

> In the concluding portion of the psalm (vv 9c–11), the psalmist expresses assurance both that he was delivered from the immediate threat of death and that he was restored to a full life in God's presence. With respect to the initial meaning of the psalm, it is probable that this concluding section should not be interpreted either Messianically or in terms of individual eschatology. . . . The acute concern of the psalmist was an immediate crisis and an immediate deliverance. His body had been endangered and his life threatened with untimely termination in *Sheol*. . . . From one perspective, this change in meaning attributed to the text may be examined in the context of the history of interpretation. . . . . From another perspective, it is an example of the double meanings which may be inherent in the text of Scripture. . . From either perspective, the new meaning imparted to the text suggests not only progress, but contrast. The psalmist was faced with imminent death; he rose in confidence above that danger to know the fullness of life in God's presence. But in the new interpretation, Jesus not only faces imminent death—he goes on to die; whereas from the psalmist's theological perspective, death would end it all, in the experience of Jesus, death became a door. The psalmist rose up in confidence against the danger of death: Jesus rose up in confidence from the actual stronghold of death. While God did not abandon the psalmist to Sheol, he delivered Jesus from Sheol.

(Craigie, *op. cit.*, on CD.)

Psalm 23

Introduction and Summary

Without doubt this psalm holds first place in the hearts of most religious people. The poetic beauty of the psalm along with the message it conveys speak to the life and feelings of every person. William Taylor has rightly said, "In the course of the centuries this psalm has won for itself a supreme place in the religious literature of the world. All who read it, whatever their age, race, or circumstances, find in the quiet beauty of its thoughts a range and depth of spiritual insight that both satisfies and possesses their souls." (Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 123.)

Since Gunkel created his categories for the psalms most scholars have viewed this as a Psalm of Trust but some still considered it a Psalm of Thanksgiving. We must remember that these categories are primarily based on structure and form rather than simple content.

The use of the psalm also comes into and the discussion and bears on the authorship and time of composition. Some believe it was composed as a liturgical psalm to be used in the temple worship. Others believe it was composed by a pious Jew to express his faith and confidence in the Lord. Some believe it was composed during the exilic period as the psalmist was reminiscing about the period of the Exodus and God's care for his people. Thus the psalm was designed to be an encouragement for the exiles who were cut off from their home and the temple. Craigie concludes that the language of the psalm is not sufficiently explicit to establish beyond a doubt the original sense and setting of the psalm. Therefore one's interpretation might depend in part on whether the psalm was originally intended as an encouragement to the exiles, for liturgical use in the temple, or as the simple reminiscence of a pious Jew. Perhaps the psalm was originally the reminiscence of a pious Jew but later came to have liturgical use of the temple. There are certain fundamental principles expressed in the psalm which would apply in each of these hypotheses. (Craigie, *op. cit.*)

William Taylor says that the reference to "the house of the Lord" removes it from possible Davidic authorship and he places it in the postexilic period. In addition he contends that the class of wisdom literature to which the psalm belongs appears to be a late development in the history of Israel. (Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 123.) The expression "house of the Lord" however does not necessitate a postexilic date, nor does it necessarily remove it from the time of David. As far back as Ex. 23:19, the expression "house of the Lord" is found at least ten times prior to the time of Solomon's temple. Assigning the period of development wisdom literature to postexilic times is quite arbitrary. Relatively little is said by the scholars defending the Davidic authorship claimed in the superscription. On the other hand, Delitzsch says, "If David is the author, and there is no reason for doubting it, then this Psalm belongs to the time of the rebellion under Absalom, and this supposition is confirmed on every hand." (Keil and Delitzsch, op. cit.) However, the exact time in David's life cannot be ascertained with any degree of certainty.

The psalm divides itself into two basic sections. Verses 1-4 describe the protection of the divine Shepherd while verses 5-6 describe the physical blessings provided by the Shepherd. In the first part of the psalm the Lord is shown to be a Shepherd but in the second part he becomes a host

who provides for the daily needs of the psalmist. The psalmist sees the Lord as an attentive Shepherd who continues to provide for the daily needs of his sheep.

Commentary

In verse 1 the Lord is spoken of as the shepherd of the psalmist. The fundamental point in the psalm – God as a Shepherd – is found in many places in the Old Testament. Jesus also made use of this metaphor particularly in John's Gospel. Two of the great leaders of Israel, Moses and David, were both called from keeping sheep to become leaders of God's people. In addition the prophet Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa.

The thesis of the psalm centers on two interrelated function of the shepherd. These are protection and provision. A major part of the economy of Palestine, particularly in the south consisted of raising and caring for sheep. Generally speaking the Palestinian shepherds did not keep their sheep for the purpose of selling them for slaughter and food but for the value of their wool. The sheep and the shepherd therefore came to know each other very well because of their years of close association. The survival of the sheep depended on the constant care of the shepherd and the livelihood of the shepherd depended on the wool produced by the sheep. Therefore this has been described as a relationship of tenderness. All of this may have been in the mind of the poet as he penned the words, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." The shepherd knows his sheep and the sheep know their shepherd. There is also a certain amount of solitude here since shepherds spent many nights in the fields watching over their flocks.

Centuries of Palestinian tradition were incorporated into the opening statement of this palm. One cannot help but wonder about the rich background and spiritual experience of the psalmist. The use of the pronoun "my" adds to the profound personal character of the phrase. Although God is frequently described as the shepherd of his people, he is almost never described as the shepherd of an individual. The exact expression, "my shepherd" only occurs four times in the Old Testament. In Gen. 48:15 Jacob blessed Joseph using the idea that the Lord is Jacob's shepherd. However, the phrase in that passage is usually translated "fed me" or "led me" instead of "my shepherd." In Zech. 13:7 the term is used in an entirely different type of situation. In Is. 44:28 the Lord refers to Cyrus as "my shepherd" because he was to be the one who would allow the people of Judah to return to their homeland. However, this is a very different use of the metaphor than we find in Ps. 23:1. In the New Testament Jesus refers to himself as "the Good Shepherd."

The phrase which follows the declaration, "The Lord is my shepherd," is one which, with equal beauty and simplicity, expresses the psalmist's absolute trust in his Shepherd; "I shall not want." The simplicity and depth of both statements arrest our attention. This is his expression of thanksgiving for the past, and his full confidence in the future. For some however, this statement brings up the question about righteous people suffering from poverty or other deprivations. Does this passage teach the prosperity or physical security of the righteous? Is poverty and deprivation evidence of an ungodly life? The psalmist is not saying that he has complete assurance that the necessities of life will always be provided for him if he lives a righteous life. Instead, he is stating his confidence in the protection and providence of God, not in the specific situations of life but from a broad and general point of view. In Ps. 37:25 we have a blanket statement, "I was

young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." It is easy to think in terms of absolutes in such cases but in doing this we miss the meaning of these poetic statements. Poetry, both Biblical and secular, deals in symbolic statements, ideal situations, and sometimes in impossible concepts and absolutes. Those impossible concepts must not be taken as literal and the absolutes must not be taken as unlimited. Both have a deeply symbolic meaning. Poetic license always has to be taken into consideration as we read the Psalms and other poetry. It sometimes conflicts with reality and literal interpretations. Rather than looking at this as a firm absolute reality we need to look at it as a symbolic ideal.

Verses 2-3 portray the basic character of the God-led life. The psalmist is describing the Lord's leadership in such a life and his complete confidence in the Lord. As the shepherd seeks out the lush green grass for his flock, so the psalmist sees God's concern for him. This is a picture of the rest and tranquility which the Shepherd provides. In addition to the abundant provision of the green grass, the poet enjoys not only the provision of water to quench the thirst, but also the serenity and beauty of the still waters. Sheep are, to a great degree, helpless animals. They are poorly equipped to defend themselves against their wild enemies. When a sheep, with a heavy coat of wool falls into deep or turbulent water it is almost sure to drown. In contrast to this the psalmist pictures his Shepherd as leading him beside still waters.

When the psalmist says "He restores my soul" he is speaking of the rejuvenation of the whole person. The word "soul" refers to the whole person not just the spirit. The Greek word ψυχη (*psuchē*) is found in the New Testament and the LXX referring to one's life. It is the origin of the English word "psychology," *i.e.* the study of life. Many commentators relate this statement, "He restores my soul," to some of the events of the Exodus when God guided Israel through its wilderness wanderings.

As the shepherd's responsibility is to guide the sheep into safe places the psalmist says that the Lord guides him in the pathways of righteousness. This is "for his name's sake." In Ps. 106:8 an unidentified psalmist speaks of the Exodus and the guidance of God, using the same expression, "for his name's sake." In both of these, the name of the Lord is invoked because of the sacred character of his name. Among ancient people the name of their god was of special importance and to call that name or to act in that name was sacred. Israel revered the name of the Lord, not in observance of a pagan custom but in memory of the mighty acts of the Lord in their history. This upholds the idea of the sacred covenant promises which the Lord had made to Israel. With the highest integrity the Lord stands by those promises.

In verse 4 the phrase, "Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death" has interesting word structure. The literal sense is "Although I walk in a very deep shadow, perhaps the deepest darkness of midnight." The LXX translates this phrase, "πορευθω εν μεσω σκιας θανατου," ("*poreuthō en mesō skias thanatou"*) which literally says "I travel [make my journey] right in the middle of the very deep shadow [or total darkness] of death." As such, it is very expressive of the dangers faced by the psalmist. He is not emphasizing the idea that "there is no fear in death," but to affirm the security he feels in the presence of his shepherd even in the face of the threats of death.

The reason for this confidence is that the rod and staff of the shepherd bring assurance of security and comfort. This vivid picture is that of a very dark ravine which could be infested with wild animals and many dangers. However the psalmist faces these dangers with confidence. The rod and staff of the shepherd were very important for his own the safety and the safety of the sheep. The shepherd's rod was used as a defensive tool against intruders or animals, and the skillful shepherd knew how to fight with it. The staff the other hand was frequently used to rescue a fallen sheep or one who was caught in a thicket. The staff was also used to guide a wayward sheep and to fend off wild animals.

In verses 5-6 we have a slight change in tone. The Shepherd has now become the host for the psalmist preparing a table of food in the presence of the poet's enemies. Even with enemies lurking all around, when danger is seen so close at hand, the Shepherd provides a meal for the psalmist in the very presence of all his foes. Some commentators believe that the psalmist is saying the Shepherd has successfully led the sheep to the end of their homeward journey and now they are safe in the sheep fold. Those who would bring harm are locked outside while the sheep are safely at rest in the sheepfold. The psalm mixes the metaphors and now the psalmist is ready to enjoy the meal prepared by the Shepherd. The psalmist is the honored guest at the meal and as such the Shepherd anoints him with oil. His cup of blessings overflows and the goodness and mercy of the Lord will follow him throughout his life. Finally he envisions the highest blessing he can imagine – to dwell in the Lord's presence (house) forever. In both Hebrew and Greek, this is literally "for my length of days." That is, "as long as I live."

Chapter X
The Royal Psalms

Introduction

This group of psalms is considered by some scholars as a minor category but Roland Murphy says, "*Royal Psalms* is an important and a practical classification, based on content. The subject is the king, and this cuts across several classifications." (Murphy, *op. cit.,* p. 15.) Murphy then cites Psalm 18, 20, 21, 89, and 144 as examples of this crossover.

These psalms are also referred to as "The Psalms of Anointing." In their content, some of these psalms are similar to the Enthronement Psalms which are sometime called the Psalms of the Lord of Zion (*e.g.* 93, 96, 97, and 99) but their form and structure do not fit that category very well. The royal psalms did not always deal entirely with the royalty. Some show elements of weddings or other celebrations and some celebrate victories in battles. However, there appears to be an underlying note of royalty in each of them. The psalms which celebrate the king's accession or its anniversary were thought by Mowinckel to be part of an annual enthronement of God similar to the Babylonian and other Middle Eastern practices and this belief is strongly advocated by many scholars. A great deal of speculation is usually involved in these conclusions.

In their historical context the Royal Psalms appear to speak of certain kings of the United Monarchy or the Davidic kings of Judah and their coronation or annual celebration of that event. As already stated, this celebration in Israel was not fashioned after the Babylonian or Canaanite tradition. As we shall see, in later Judaism some of these psalms were applied to the Messiah as King, thus becoming prophetic. Examples of this can be seen in Ps. 2, 45, and 110. There are also instances of the historical contextual meaning of the text and its ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah.

A characteristic of some of these psalms is that there may be a Messianic message or prediction intended. Usually however this would not have been evident to the original recipients. When we see the New Testament use of these psalms that message becomes clearer. Some commentators believe that there is a Messianic prediction in almost all of the psalms in this category and long lists of such predictions have been compiled. Almost universally this approach overlooks the historical and contextual meaning of those psalms and misses their messages to the original recipients. Our starting place in understanding the psalms must always be the original message to the original audience. The royal psalms present particular temptations to speculate.

Psalm 2

Introduction and Summary

Many commentators believe that this psalm is, in fact part of Psalm 1. In some Hebrew manuscripts and in some Latin and Greek manuscripts it is shown that way. James Mays says that Psalm 1 deals with the question of the individual facing an evil in society. The answer in Psalm 1 is the instruction of the Lord (the Law) as a guide to life. Conversely, Psalm 2 describes the problems of the Israelite community as it faces the history of the surrounding nations and their determination for conquest and power. (Mays, *op. cit.*, p. 44.) Patrick Miller expresses a similar position. Thus the mode of empires is emphasized rather than the moral and ethical problems of the individual. (Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 87.) This appears to be the position of the majority of commentators.

During the reign of David there was considerable war and expansion of the kingdom of Israel. Solomon reigned over the area acquired by David but he did not expand the territory. We must remember that in the eyes of the faithful Israelites their nation was a theocracy – a God-ruled government – with a human king who ruled by divine appointment from God, the ultimate King. Therefore for a foreign nation to fight against Israel's king was for it to fight against the only true God. Their divinely appointed king was held in the very highest esteem by faithful Israelites. At times he was referred to as God's son (verse 7) but this was not thought of in a Messianic way since the Jews did not hold to any kind of doctrine of the Trinity. David became king under divine appointment (II San. 7:1-29) and his reign was characterized by many victories over the neighboring states of Moab, Edom, Ammon, and Syria. Although that was not worldwide domination as the psalm describes, it constituted the greatest expanse of the Israelite kingdom during its entire history. In addition, poetic license has to be considered when reading the poem. The reign of David was the most outstanding in the entire history of Israel. Solomon reigned over the territory captured by David and the grandeur of his reign outshone that of David in many respects.

When we first begin reading this psalm the New Testament use of it in Acts 4:25-26 stands out in our minds. That is where the ultimate answer is going to be given but it is doubtful that the original recipients of the psalm would have seen it as Messianic. Later, however the postexilic Jews may have thought of it in that light. See the discussion below. The psalm has no superscription but the church in Jerusalem attributed it to David and this is considered by various commentators to be the best conclusion. David, better than any other king of Israel, fits the descriptions and accomplishments mentioned in the psalm.

Murphy and most other scholars believe this psalm was probably written at the time of a king's accession to the throne in Jerusalem or perhaps an anniversary of the accession but there is no way to identify the king of whom the writer is speaking other than the statement in Acts 5. The coronation of a king was accompanied by a document usually called The Proclamation. The details of the psalms are sometime compared to the oracle of Nathan in II Sam. 7:8-16.

There are exaggerated scenes described in the psalm, *e.g.* "I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession." Once again poetic symbolism must be taken into consideration. These types of exaggerated statements were frequently used when addressing a monarch or describing his position. Nehemiah addressed Artaxerxes by saying, "May the king live forever," Neh. 2:2-3. See also Dan. 2:4, 3:9, 5:10, 6:6. The Cyrus Cylinder records Cyrus referring to himself as "Cyrus, king of the world." The monarch in this psalm is given authority from God, he has been anointed by God, and God will greatly expand his kingdom and authority. The pagan concept of the enthronement of their god such as Marduk should not diminish the truth that Old Testament teaches that God was dynamically working in the history of Israel.

The psalm as a whole has a very strong royal content. Many phrases call our attention to this. Look at the following expressions: nations were raging "against the Lord and against his anointed one;" "the one enthrone in heaven;" "I have installed my king in Zion;" "I will make the nations your inheritance;" "you will rule them with an iron scepter;" and "you kings be wise; be warned you rulers of the earth."

There is evidence that during the late postexilic period some of the Jews considered Psalm 2 to be a Messianic psalm. In the Psalms of Solomon, a pseudepigraphic book written between 70 and 40 B.C., we have a probable reference to the Messianic hope of Israel at that time. In chapter 17 of that book we have the following statement: "You, O Lord, chose David (to be) king over Israel, and swore to him concerning his descendents forever that never should his kingdom fail before you." (Ps. of Sol. 17:4). The writer then describes God's displeasure with Israel throughout its history but he expresses hope for a time in the future. This is thought by many scholars to be referring to the Messianic Age.

He continues:

> Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David, at the time known to you, O God, in order that he may reign over Israel your servant. And gird him with strength that he may shatter unrighteous rulers, and that he may purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample (her) down to destruction. Wisely, righteously he shall thrust out sinners from (the) inheritance; he shall destroy the arrogance of the sinner as a potter's jar. With a rod of iron he shall shatter all their substance; he shall destroy the godless nations with the word of his mouth. At his rebuke nations shall flee before him, and he shall reprove sinners for the thoughts of their heart. And he shall gather together a holy people, whom he shall lead in righteousness, and he shall judge the tribes of the people who have been made holy by the Lord his God.

(Psalms of Solomon 17:21-26).

It is obvious that the age which he foresees is strictly a Jewish political/religious entity with a descendant of David as its king.

For the complete text of the Psalms of Solomon go to:
http://www.goodnewsinc.net/othbooks/psalmsol.html

For introductory information on the Psalms of Solomon go to:
http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12411-psalms-of-solomon-the

For general information on the Psalms of Solomon go to:
http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/psalmssolomon.html

The psalm it made up of four easily recognizable parts. (1) Foreign nations and their rulers express their rebellion against God and his king (2:1-3). (2) God mocks these kings and announces his intent to set up his own king in Zion (2:4-6). (3) The king himself speaks, declaring the words of the divine proclamation (2:7-9). (4) The kings of the earth are warned of God's wrath and the consequences of his anger (2:10-12). This brief outline assumes the prophetic character of the psalm and its Davidic royalty although it does not ignore the message to the people of its day.

Commentary

In verse 1 the word translated "conspire" (NIV) appears in the LXX as φρυαττω (*phruattō*) meaning "to rage." The KJV and ASV translate this as "rage" and the RSV, NRSV, and NIV use "conspire." The psalmist begins by asking the question, "Why is there a conflict between nations?" They are in fact conspiring against (or raging against) God's Anointed. The king's coronation combined regal authority and divine authority. Although we might seek a specific historical setting for this psalm, the psalmist does not appear to be interested in a specific situation. Instead, he is stating a broad general idea that all nations should recognize the God of Israel and its king who rules by divine appointment. Consequently our poet begins by wondering why the surrounding nations would rebel.

The expression, "God's anointed" occurs in verse 1. At the time of their coronation the kings were anointed (I Kgs, 1:43-45) symbolizing that they were set aside from other persons to perform the particular services of the kingship. Thus, in the eyes of Israel, the Davidic king of the theocracy was always considered "God's anointed." Many passages in the Old Testament refer to the king in this way. The word "anointed" is from a Hebrew word which can also be translated "messiah." This word did not necessarily carry a Messianic prediction of the coming of Christ. It translates into the Greek LXX as χριστος (*christos*) meaning "anointed one" or "Christ." In translation this may present some confusion unless we keep in mind the original use of the word. No doubt, to the original readers of Palm 2 there would have been no such confusion since they would have considered this simply the anointing of their king not the prediction of a future Messianic King. There are numbers of nontechnical words in the Bible which are given technical or theological meaning as the context may indicate. Four very familiar words used in these ways are κυριος (*kurios*) meaning lord, master, or possessor, πρεσβυτερος (*presbuteros*) meaning an older person or elder, επισκοπος (*episkopos*) meaning bishop, overseer, or guardian, and βαπτιζω (*baptizō*) meaning to dip, plunge or immerse. Each of these is used in the New Testament in a secular and also in a technical way. Context determines the meaning in each case.

In verse 3 the intent of these rebellious kings is stated. They wanted to "break their chains" as

animals in their attempts to break loose. The phrase also occurs in Ps. 107:14. Psalm 2 takes for granted that there are vassal states included in the territory ruled by the king. The kings of these vassal states are plotting their revolt against the king of Israel. We must keep in mind that up to this point the psalmist has been speaking of the threat of a military rebellion among these vassal kings. However, in the mind of the psalmist this is a rebellion against the "Lord's anointed" king of the theocracy.

In verses 4-6 the scene changes to the heavenly court where, in derision the one "enthroned in heaven laughs" at this conspiracy. God's mockery and anger are prompted by the rebellion and arrogance the earthly kings. Peter Craigie makes an interesting observation. "Throughout these opening six verses, the entire scene is strictly imaginary; that is, imaginary nations (though they are rooted in the reality of constant historical experiences) rebel and God responds. Yet this dramatic imagery serves to give international and cosmic significance to the first climax of the psalm, namely v 6. God terrifies the earthly rulers, not with any direct threat, but simply with an announcement that he has established his king in Zion." (Craigie, *op. cit.*)

In verse 6 the statement "I have established my king in Zion" is indicative of the divine appointment of the Davidic king. In the Hebrew text and also in the LXX the pronoun "I" is emphatic. The word translated "established" appears in the LXX as καθιστημι (*kathistēmi*). It is a strong word meaning "to set," "to cause to be," or "to constitute." This is seen in considerable contrast to the fruitless conspiracy of the nations in rebellion. Their power is nothing in comparison to the power of the Lord who has "established" his king. This is the reason that God laughs at them in their arrogance.

In verses 7-9 the proclamation is made. The one "enthroned in heaven" speaks to the king. The substance of this four-fold proclamation is this. First, "You are my son; today I have become your father." Second, "I will make the nations your inheritance." Third, "You will rule them with an iron scepter." Fourth, "You will dash them to pieces like pottery." Notice that this strong statement is linked to verse 6, "I have *established* my king in Zion." If Israel had been faithful to the Lord her future would have been secure. Look at the individual parts of this proclamation.

First, the Davidic king of Israel is reigning as God's own son. He reigns, not primarily by virtue of fleshly succession but by divine appointment as the son of God. Even here however, it is doubtful that the original recipients would have thought of this in terms of a Messianic prediction. To them this would have been a symbolic description of the relationship of their king to their God. We must remember that the ancient Jews had no concept of a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. During the ministry of Christ this was one of the stumbling blocks to the Jews. The ancient pagans frequently considered their monarch as a son of their god. This was prominent in Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon but was probably most strongly stressed in Egypt. This is not to say that the psalmist was looking at the theocratic character of the Davidic kingship as the equivalent of the pagan concept or an adaptation of that concept. He was drawing a contrast. The pagan concept was mythological but the proclamation of which the psalmist speaks comes from the one Creator God.

The second element of this proclamation says, "Ask me and I will make the nations your inheritance." We have no way of knowing exactly what image this would have brought up in the minds of the Israelites of the psalmist's day but literal world domination was probably not considered. Taken symbolically this can be thought of as the willingness of God to share his world-wide domination with the king he has anointed in Zion, thus emphasizing the power of the king and God's approval of him. This was the symbolic ideal but not the global reality.

Third, "You will rule them with an iron scepter" follows the symbolism of the previous statement. In Rev. 2:27, 12:5, and 19:15 we find a similar symbolic statement. Particularly in the book of Revelation Jesus is shown to be the ruler of all things – the "King of king and the Lord of lords." Some have taken these symbolic statements literally and have used them to defend the idea of a millennial reign of Jesus on earth. These conclusions ignore the contexts in which these statements are found.

Fourth, "You will dash them to pieces like pottery." To the ancient Israelites this would also have been a symbolic statement of the great power of the one who rules on the Davidic throne because his power is assured by the one who sits on the heavenly throne.

Verses 10-12 constitute a warning to the rulers of the earthly kingdoms. We can easily see the contextual interpretation of this section and at the same time see a Messianic interpretation. The poet is warning the nations surrounding Israel that they must not interfere with Israel's sovereignty. They therefore should fear the Lord as they rejoice with trembling. The idea of serving the Lord appears to have both theological and political implications. The vassal nations are warned to serve the God of Israel. In order to do so they must also submit to the son of the God of Israel, *i.e.*, the king of Israel. From the point of view of the original recipients, this would not be a reference to the Messiah who was to come later but to their human ruling monarch who was "the Lord's anointed."

In verse 12 they are called upon to the "kiss the son." In the ancient Middle East the act of kissing the monarch was an act of homage and submission. See I Sam. 10:1 when Saul was anointed. In I Kgs. 19:18 the idea of kissing an idol is presented. The psalmist says that refusal to submit to the Lord would result in disaster. Finally the psalmist pronounces a blessing on all to take refuge in him. This may have a double meaning, applying to the king of Israel and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Use of Psalm 2 in the New Testament

Psalm 2 is one of the most frequently quoted psalms in the New Testament. Therefore it plays an important role in our understanding of the early church's use of some Old Testament statements which came to be considered Messianic. To the early church Psalm 2 was the embodiment of the Messianic expectation and its fulfillment. Thus far we have seen the psalm primarily as a Royal Psalm associated with the king's coronation. Its New Testament use is quite different from its Old Testament setting and message. Therefore we must review the idea of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament and then proceed to the New Testament to see its ultimate meaning.

The Old Testament treats Israel as a theocracy. Going back as far as the exodus event we see that the central theme throughout the Old Testament is God's rulership *i.e.* his kingship. This was personified in the nation of Israel. That is, the Old Testament treats Israel as the kingdom of God. The exact phrase "kingdom of God" does not appear in the Old Testament, but the idea is strongly expressed. The phrase "the Kingdom of the Lord" is found twice in the Old Testament but not in the New Testament. See I Chron. 28:5 and II Chron. 13:8. The references below show how the idea of a kingdom had engaged the minds of Israel from the very beginning of their nation. This grew into the Messianic expectation. It is important however that we remember that there is very little information from non-canonical Jewish writings of the Intertestamental Period describing any sort of widespread Messianic expectation within the Israelite nation. Some of the Old Testament references are given below.

Exodus 19:5-6. "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This is the first time that the kingdom idea occurs in the Bible. The concept of God as Israel's King and Israel as the "kingdom of the Lord" goes back to this point.

Num 23:21. Balaam's oracle. In speaking of Israel he says, "The Lord their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them."

Deut. 17:14-20. Moses instructs Israel that if they ask for a king at some later time, this is the kind of king they would have. This does not preclude the idea of an Israelite king but it specifies the character of the king. Later when Israel had its king, he was referred to as "God's anointed." See I Sam. 24:6, 10, and Ps. 89:20.

I Sam. 8:1-22. Israel asked for a king and it displeased God. It is important to remember that the heathen nations around Israel (Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Canaan, Midian, etc.) attributed some degree of divinity to their kings. In Egypt and Mesopotamia the office of king was the means of integrating society with its gods. The early Egyptians considered the Pharaoh to be a god incarnate, and a sort of mediator of the blessings of their god to the people. Later he was considered more a representative of the god rather than a truly divine being.

In Mesopotamia the idea was not so much that the king was a god (divine), but that he was a human being who was the divinely appointed servant and "son" of one of the gods. The king was still a human being, but was "adopted" by the gods. Although Israel never fully adopted this position, the Canaanite-Egyptian-Mesopotamian influence may have played a part in their request for a king who would lead them in battle as the kings of the other nations did. It was the idea of rejecting God as their king that was displeasing to the Lord. They wanted a king "such as all the other nations have." God said to Samuel, "It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king." This shows that the idea of Israel being God's kingdom – the kingdom of God – was always in the mind of the Lord.

Ps. 2:6-7. "I have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill. . . You are my son, today I have become your father." Although we see this as a Messianic psalm, the readers of that day probably

saw it simply as a royal psalm demonstrating God's dynamic personal involvement with the king.

Ps. 5:2. "Listen to my cry for help my King and my God."

Ps. 10:16. "The Lord is King forever and ever."

Ps. 24:7-10. "The King of glory shall come in."

Other references could be cited but these show that the idea of the "kingdom of God" goes back to the very beginning of Israel's history. It is important that we keep this in mind as we look at the Royal-Messianic psalms of the Old Testament and investigate their New Testament usage. For examples, see Ps. 45:6-7 quoted in Heb. 1:8-9 and Ps. 110:1 quoted in Heb. 1:13.

When speaking of Psalm 2, Stewart Perowne says, "In later Jewish writings nearly every verse of the psalm was quoted as referring to the messiah." (Perowne, *op. cit.,* pp. 300-301.) He then lists a short summary of these sources. As shown earlier in the quotation from the Psalms of Solomon, some sort of Messianic expectation was developing within parts of the Jewish community during the Intertestamental Period.

The Qumran community developed an interesting and important Messianic hope. The exact time when this community was created and settled at the north shore of the Dead Sea is not known but it has been demonstrated by archaeological evidence that this probably took place about 150 B.C. The Qumran scrolls show evidence of a Messianic expectation within that community. James VanderKam says, "The life of the community was a substitute for the temple rituals of sacrifice and atonement. . . . Belief in two messiahs (mentioned in [column] 9.11) was already held at this time." (James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today,* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids), 1994, p. 106.) There was to be "a messiah from Aaron and Israel" which confused scholars because of the ambiguity of the phrase. With the discovery of the Manual of Discipline there was found a phrase which indicated two separate messiahs were expected but the lineage of the "messiah from Israel" was still not known. VanderKam also speaks of the messiah of Israel as being a secular figure. "This pattern of both a secular and a priestly leader of the end time is repeated in a relatively large number of Qumran texts of diverse types: rules, commentaries (continuous and thematic), and eschatological works. The messiah of Israel turns out to be a descendant of David as one might have expected." (VanderKam, *op. cit.,* p. 117.) In Jn. 1:19-21 and 4:25 we see a hint of this during the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. However, there was no uniformity within Israel concerning the Messianic hope.

When Jesus began his preaching ministry his message was, "the kingdom of God is at hand." (Mk. 1:14-15). It was from the perspective discussed above that the Gospel writers recorded their information about the message of "the good news." It was this message and perspective which made the royalty of Psalm 2 so important to the early church. Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16) emphasizes the two paramount truths of Ps. 2 – "You are the Christ, the Anointed One" (Ps. 2:2) and you are "the Son of the living God" (Ps. 2:7). The New Testament affirms Christ's sonship at his baptism (Matt: 3:17) at the transfiguration (Matt: 17:5), Paul's sermon at Antioch (Acts 13:33), Paul's statement to the Roman

church (Rom. 1:4) and in other references. An important difference in the literal Davidic king of Israel and Jesus as the Messiah is the fact that Psalm 2 pictures an ideal situation but its fulfillment in Christ pictures a real situation. No one who occupied the throne of David in Jerusalem was ever expected to rule all the nations of the earth, but the basic design of God's kingdom under Christ is for "every nation" (Matt. 28:18-19). That has not become a reality, but it is God's will. The book of Revelation has an abundance of references to Ps. 2. See Rev. 1:5, 2:27, 4:2, 6:17, 12:5, 19:15 and others.

The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 2 in support of Jesus as the fulfillment of those predictions. This psalm therefore plays an important role in the Christology of the New Testament. The symbolism of the original statement, "You are my son" takes upon itself a new meaning in the New Testament doctrine of the incarnation. The incarnation is declared to be validated by the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 1:4). In his speech in Antioch Paul referred to this psalm (Acts 13:33), and the writer of Hebrews quotes from it to defend the superiority of Jesus to the angels (Heb. 1:5).

Psalm 21

Introduction and Summary

There are various types of material in this psalm as a whole. It is generally classified as a Royal Psalm but it also has liturgical qualities. William Taylor and some others however believe it should be classified as a Psalm of Lament. (Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 112.) Scholars generally accept the premise that the priests, prophets, and Levites sometimes alternated with the congregation in singing various parts of some of the psalms. In both books of Chronicles and Ezra we find that various singers and other musicians were appointed for the temple worship but we have very little concrete information about the details of that worship. See I Chron. 6:31-32, 9:33, 15:16-17, 15:19-20, II Chron. 29:25-26, and Ezra 3:10-11. In Eph. 5:19 Paul says that Christians are to "Speak to one another with psalms." The statement, "speak to one another" no doubt came from the tradition of the ancient Jews as they practiced antiphonal singing.

Some scholars believe that Psalms 20 and 21 are related. Psalm 20 begins with the request, "May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you." Ps. 20:1. Psalm 21 opens with this statement: "Lord, the king rejoices in your strength. How great is his joy in the victories you give! You have granted him the desire of his heart and have not withheld the request of his lips." Ps. 21:1-2. Some scholars conclude that the desires expressed in Ps. 20:1 are the desires said to be fulfilled in Ps. 21:1-2. A major weakness of this conclusion is that there are many psalms which begin with requests for God's blessings of victory and also many psalms which begin with thanksgiving for victories. Various other objections have also been lodged against this relationship.

We do not know the exact social or political setting of the psalm but the mention of victories (verse 5, 8, and 11) makes one think of thanksgiving for both military and personal success as the king confronts his enemies. The psalm opens (verses 1-4) with the expression of gratitude that the Lord had granted the desire of the king's heart. Perowne says that many of the Royal Psalms have an indirect Messianic character. That is the Davidic king could always be considered a predecessor the Messiah who was to come.

The psalm does not contain the elements of the coronation of the king or an annual celebration of the king's reign as is characteristic of some other Royal Psalms. However some scholars believe that the liturgical character of the psalm is evidence of that sort of celebration.

The psalm divides itself into two sections. Verses 1-7 constitute a prayer to the Lord on behalf of the king with his acknowledgment of God's past blessings of victory. Verses 8-12 express the king's confidence that the Lord will bring victory in future conflicts. Verse 13 is the king's concluding prayer that the Lord may be exalted. Since this psalm speaks of the king and his victories, scholars are practically unanimous in believing that the time of writing was preexilic.

Commentary

In verse 1 the psalmist expresses the king's rejoicing in the strength of the Lord and his expressions of thanksgiving that the Lord has answered his prayers. In verse 2 the psalmist summarizes the response of the Lord by saying that all of the desires of the king's heart and every request from his lips have been granted. Once again, notice the synonymous parallelism throughout this psalm.

Verses 3-7 enumerate some of the blessings the king has received. The Lord has richly blessed him and placed a crown of pure gold on his head. In the LXX the Greek word for crown is στεφανος (*stephanos*) which refers to a victor's crown rather than a monarch's crown. This would be appropriate in this setting because the king is expressing gratitude for the victories which the Lord has granted rather the celebration of the coronation. The Greek word for the crown of a monarch is διαδημα (*diadēma*). Rather than referring to a crown "of pure gold" the LXX uses the phrase εκ λιθου τιμιου (*ek lithou timiou*), literally "from very costly stones."

In II Sam. 12:26-30 we have the account of David's capture of the Ammonite city of Rabba. At the time of that victory the crown from the king of Rabba was taken away and it was placed on David's head. The crown was gold and weighed 1 talent. This was equal to about 75 pounds or 36 kilograms. It was also set with precious stones. The parallels between II Sam. 12:26-30 and Psalm 21 has caused some commentators to conclude that this was the setting which the psalmist had in mind. Keil, who advocates this position, says that this crown was renowned for its great weight and beauty. (Keil and Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, on CD). Perowne however, does not believe this is a necessary conclusion and contends that the language is symbolic. (Perowne, *op. cit.*, p. 233.)

In verse 4 the psalmist says that the king asked for life and the Lord lengthened his days "forever and ever." Most commentators agree that in the language of the royal courts of the ancient Middle East this would simply have the force of "many years." It was characteristic of those people to pray or otherwise express their desire that the king would "live forever." See I Kgs, 1:31, Neh. 2:3, Dan. 2:4, 3:9, and 6:6. Some however, contend that this is the introduction of immortality into the Old Testament text. Others believe that this expression gives the psalm the character and force of a Messianic prediction. Perowne says that the ancient Aramaic Targum and some of the older rabbinical writings leaned toward the idea that the description of the king could not have applied to an earthly monarch. Therefore, in the opinion of those ancient Jewish commentators and rabbis the psalm was considered Messianic. The Targums were Aramaic translations of portions of the Old Testament which were used in the synagogues after the Babylonian Exile. They also contained brief commentaries on certain passages. For that reason, the Psalm came to be referred to as "The Psalm of the Messiah." Perowne believes that these conclusions do not necessarily exclude the possibility of its original application to David. (Perowne, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-234.) On the other hand, there seems to be no compelling reason to consider the psalm as Messianic.

Verses 5-7 continue to describe the great blessings which the Lord has brought to the king. The victories which the Lord provided have brought great glory, splendor, and majesty to the king.

No doubt this refers to the military victories. All of the successes of the king, not just his military might, are attributed to the intervention of the Lord.

Verse 7 is an affirmation of the king's complete trust in the Lord. The king will never be shaken from this trust. Notice that in this verse we have a change in the use of the personal pronoun. In verses 1-6 the second personal pronoun, "you" is employed but in verse 7 the poet begins using the third person pronoun, "he." Many scholars believe that verses 2-6 and are being spoken by the congregation in a temple liturgy referring to God's gracious blessings on the king.

Verses 8 -12 are thought to have been uttered by the main speaker such as a priest, a Levite, or a prophet as he enumerates some of the activities of the king particularly in reference to his military exploits. This is thought of as "covenant language" in which God, through his loving kindness, will protect his people Israel because Israel places its trust in the Lord. The speaker is confident that the king will be victorious because God will intervene. This brings up a question. Are these verses being addressed to the king or are they the expressions of the speaker showing his confidence that the Lord will act in behalf of the king? Scholars are divided on this since it may be taken either way. Most believe that this is being addressed to the king as affirmations of the king's complete trust in the Lord. Examples are, "Your hand *will* lay hold," "Your right hand *will* seize," "You *will* make them like a fiery furnace," "In his wrath the Lord *will* swallow them up." Statements such as these were characteristic of poetic expressions and the oriental custom of exaggerating a king's victories.

In verse 9 the writer says "You will make them as a furnace of fire." This is capable of two different interpretations. The writer may mean that they will become a furnace themselves, *i.e.* they will be set afire. However he may mean that they will be fuel for an existing furnace. Verse 10 speaks of the destruction of their offspring or their descendants and the elimination of their posterity. Once again we see the oriental expression of the exaggeration of victory. Verse 11 tells of the retreat of the enemy when the king draws his bow.

Verse 13 is the simple brief doxology, "Be exalted, O Lord in your strength; we will sing and praise your might."

Psalm 110

Introduction and Summary

The reading of this psalm immediately brings to mind its application in the New Testament. It is quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other psalm, and it is always interpreted as Messianic. It is generally held by scholars that the beginning of the psalm was sung or spoken by one of the court prophets as he addressed the king as his master or "lord." However, this was not understood as "the Lord God." To its original audience it was probably considered a Royal Psalm addressing a celebration of one of Israel's Davidic kings or the coronation of a new king. See the discussion of authorship below. Some scholars have associated the psalm with an annual New Year's festival. One of the problems with this is that we do not know the exact character of those festivals. The presence of some military language has suggested to some scholars that this is a pre-battle ritual psalm, looking for the promise of victory.

On the other hand, its rich symbolism lends itself to other applications. We do not know just when this psalm began to have a Messianic interpretation among the Jews but some scholars believe that this phenomenon is indirectly referred to in the statement of Jesus in Matt. 22:41-46. (McCullough, *op. cit.,* p. 588.) Jesus' use of it seems to imply that his audience believed it to be Messianic. Its abundant use in the New Testament epistles, especially Hebrews, shows the early church's belief in its Messianic character.

Arnold B. Rhodes draws an interesting conclusion concerning the intent of the author.

> This Royal Psalm was probably written by a court poet in the early pre-exilic period to celebrate the enthronement of a new Davidic king. However, the poet of necessity would have had in mind not only the king of the moment but also the succession of kings in the House of David. This fact, together with the poet's exalted language, made it inevitable that the Psalm should eventually be interpreted in relation to the Messiah par excellence of the future, for no Old Testament king measured up to the expectations aroused by the psalmist. God in his overreaching providence has a way of tying one historical event into another in such a way that the two events become one elongated event.

Rhodes, *op. cit.,* pp. 152-153.

Leslie Allen says, "A sizable group of scholars have refused to associate the psalm with any activity of the human Davidic king and regarded it as eschatological and messianic from the outset." (Leslie Allen, *op. cit.,* on CD.)

The question naturally arises concerning the authorship and date of writing. There are many theories concerning the time of writing, reaching back as early as David (c. 1000-961 B.C.) and as late as the time of the Simon Maccabeus in the latter part of the Maccabean Revolt (142-134 B.C.). The very late date however has been rejected by almost all scholars. Some believe that it

came out of the postexilic period, perhaps during the time of Zechariah citing Zech. 3:8 in support of this. A few commentators prefer the time of Josiah when there was an upsurge of nationalism at the time of the discovery of the Book of the Law (II Kgs. 22:1-10). Some support the time of the enthronement of Solomon as the occasion for writing while others believe it was the enthronement of David which is being celebrated. Most scholars believe that it came from the early period of the monarchy, opting for the time of the enthronement of David. Some believe it dates from the time of David's conquest of Jerusalem from the Jebusites. (II Sam. 5:6-8). The best that can be said for most of these theories is that they are just theories because there's very little if any objective evidence to support them.

In the New Testament, quotations from the psalm consistently refer to David as its source. This would include an author who spoke in the place of David, and the original recipients probably understood it as such. Many scholars discard this saying that these identifications only reflect the first century belief in the Davidic authorship and those traditions and superscriptions do not carry any authority. However there is no objective reason for rejecting the Davidic authorship and some of the New Testament quotations and allusions draw heavily on David as the writer. This cannot be ignored. See Matt. 22:41-46, Mk. 12:35-37, Lk. 20:41-44, Acts 2: 34-35, 5:31, Rom. 8:34, I Cor. 15: 25, Eph. 1:20, Col. 3:1, Heb. 1:13, 5:6, 10, 6:20, 7:11, 15, 17, 21, 8:1, 10:12-13, 12:2, and I Pet. 3:22. Verse 1 holds the record for being the most frequently cited Old Testament passage to appear by quotation or allusion in the New Testament. In Mk. 12:35-37 Jesus indicated his own acceptance of it as Messianic.

An important problem with this psalm is the difficulty of the text. Stewart McCullough comments on this by saying, "The Hebrew presents many difficulties as even the non-Hebraist can infer if he notes the variations within the most recent English translations. . . . The principle obscurities are to be found in vss. 2, 3, 6, 7. The RSV adopts a conservative attitude toward the accepted text." (McCullough, *op. cit.,* pp. 588-589.) In spite of this the basic message of the psalm is clear and its messianic message is not obscure.

The psalm divides itself into two oracles which present their materials in a converse way. The first oracle, verses 1-3, emphasizes a king who is also a priest. The second oracle, verses 4-7, emphasizes a priest who is also a king. Although these are two ways of stating the same truth the emphasis is different and each oracle. As priest he represents the people to God, pleading their cause as their priestly intercessor. As king he represents God to the people, bring to them the words and messages of God. In this it is the easy to see the Messianic functions of Christ.

Commentary

Verse 1 begins in an unusual way. Our first impression is probably that the psalmist is speaking the words of the Lord God when he used the phrase, "The Lord said." The word "Lord" in both Hebrew and Greek can refer to a master in any situation and does not necessarily refer to "the Lord God." In the situation described in the psalm a superior is addressing an inferior. That is, one "Lord" (the superior) is the master of another "Lord" (an inferior). The word "Lord" was used frequently in the Old Testament and among other ancient people to show respect for the king, another dignitary, or a person considered to be a superior or one to be honored. See I Sam. 1:15, 1:26, 16:16, 22:12, 26:18, II Sam. 4:8, 14:17-19, etc.

The passage can be viewed in two different ways. Let's look at the first possibility. The poet can be describing the human king who is speaking to a person of inferior rank who is to be honored by the king or given authority by the king. This was a common practice among ancient kings in the Middle East. Ordinarily in this type of situation when the king acted, the viceroy sitting at his right hand would follow him in some appropriate way. However the viceroy would not act on his own initiative. Perowne says that some of the Greek poets spoke of this practice among the Greek gods as a way of indicating superiority and inferiority among the deities. However, among the Israelites this action was not generally viewed as the appointment or recognition of rank or as one who was a stand-in for the authority of the king. Instead, it was considered a place of honor not of power. Solomon had his mother, Bathsheba sit at his right hand as a way of honoring her but this did not place her in a position of authority, I Kgs. 2:19. (Perowne, *op. cit.*, p. 304.) No doubt this was what was in the mind of the mother of James and John when she requested that her sons be seated on the right and left of Jesus, Matt. 20:20-21. From a contextual historical viewpoint the original recipients of the psalm would have viewed it in this way.

The second possible interpretation is that the poet is using the word "Lord" in two different ways. First he uses it to refer to God and then to the king himself. We might paraphrase it in this way: "The Lord God said to my Lord the king." This would mean that God said to the king, "Sit at my right hand." Therefore it makes perfectly good sense for the poet to be speaking of God as "the Lord" and of the king as "my Lord." This interpretation may enter into the Messianic understanding of the psalm but it does not necessitate a Messianic interpretation in the context of the original recipients.

The second phrase in the first verse speaks of the duration of the position: "Until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." In the El Amarna Letters, discovered between Luxor and Cairo, Egypt in 1887, the vassal kings refer to themselves as assistants of Pharaoh. Similar phrases can also be found in Assyrian and Babylonian archives. The conquering king would frequently place his foot on the head of the conquered king emphasizing the complete submission of the enemy to the conqueror. In this psalm, the king was to sit at the right hand of the Lord until the last enemy was subdued bringing total and lasting victory to the king. To the original audience this would be considered God's sanctioning of the reign and the conquests of the Israel's king.

Verses 2-3 describe the inclusiveness and the scope of the victory. There are four things which are specified. First, the king's mighty scepter would be extended from Zion. The king scepter was symbolic of the kings power. To refer to it as the king's "mighty scepter" emphasizes this. Furthermore he says that the king's power will be extended from Zion, indicating the expansion of the king's domain.

Second, he says that the king will reign in the midst of his enemies. At the time of the conquest of Canaan it was God's intent that Israel drive out all the nations of the land but this was not done. (See Num. 33:52-55, Deut. 7:16, Josh. 13:13, Judg. 1:27-36). In the early days of David's reign he greatly expanded the land area controlled by Israel. See II Sam. 3-10. The United Kingdom of Israel reached its most extensive bounds during the reign of David.

Third, "your troops will be willing on your day of battle." (NIV) The military leadership of David is well-known and his troops loyally followed him during these conquests. Translations differ in their wording of this phrase. The following are typical of these variations. "The people shall be willing" (KJV), "Your people will offer themselves" (RSV), "Your troops will be willing" (NIV), "Your people will volunteer freely" (NASV). Notice that the NIV uses the word "troops" instead of "people." McCullough says that a literal rendering of the Hebrew would be, "Your people are freewill offerings. (McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 589.) The exact wording does not appear to be the important thing. The basic thrust of the passage is that there will be complete support for the king's endeavors. His soldiers will not be mercenaries and his people will not be serving out of selfish greed.

Fourth, "From the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth." This appears to be poetic symbolic language to describe the totality of God's presence with his people and his blessings on their endeavors. The statement of the king's youth emphasizes the king's vitality and fitness for his reign. This would be a fitting statement for either the king's coronation or for an annual celebration of the king's accession to the throne.

Verses 4-7 constitute the second oracle of the psalm. Viewed from a Messianic vantage point this is usually considered the central revelation of the psalm. However before we view it from that perspective it is important that we look at it from its own historical contextual standpoint.

The psalmist begins this oracle by saying that the Lord has taken an oath and he will change his mind. He has sworn this statement to the king: "'You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.'" The original recipients would probably have been somewhat confused by this statement because there was no such order of priests as "the order of Melchizedek." Melchizedek's name occurs only twice in the Old Testament, Gen. 14:18 and in our present psalm. His was certainly not a household name. He is not mentioned directly or indirectly anywhere in Israel's history. As we will see later Melchizedek's name occurs eight times in the book of Hebrews but nowhere else in the New Testament. Since so little is said about him in the Old Testament, it is difficult to determine what the original audience might have thought about this portion of the psalm.

We know that some of the Davidic kings performed the functions of the priest at certain times. An example of this is when David went to the house of Obed-Edom and brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. As the procession moved toward Jerusalem David offered many sacrifices and when the Ark came to rest in Jerusalem David is said to have offered additional sacrifices (II Sam. 6:12-17). Solomon is also said to have offered sacrifices before the Lord (I Kgs. 8:62-64 and 9:25). Although none of these references appear to be sufficient for us to conclude that there was a sort of "kingly-priesthood" in Judah, they do show that certain priestly functions were executed by the kings under certain circumstances. Very little information is given in the Old Testament about this but there is no indication that these kings thought of themselves as "priests of God" or priests "after the order of Melchizedek." On the other hand, a few scholars believe that there was a sort of kingly-priesthood in the Davidic line. (Leslie G. Allen, *op. cit.*, on CD.)

Verses 5-7 assure the king of his military victories. Verse 5 presents some questions concerning the identification of "the Lord" being "at your right hand." Is it the human Lord (the king) who is at the right hand of the Lord (God) or is it the Lord (God) who is at the right hand of the human Lord (the king)? Or, is someone else at the right hand of the king? Compare verse 1 with verse 5 noticing the use of the word "Lord." How would this have been understood by the original recipients? Scholars are divided over the meaning of this verse and each side presents complex arguments defending its position. The one who is "at your right hand" will accomplish a number of important things. He "will crush kings on the day of his wrath" (verse 5b) and "he will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth" (verse 6). The fact that "he will judge the nations" sounds like a divine task. However verse 7, which continues the thought, appears to apply to the king rather than the Lord God: "He will drink from a brook beside the way." There could be an intentional interchange in the use of the word "Lord" in verses 4-7. The message could be that the Lord (God) is pictured as working through the king (Lord) and the king (Lord) is pictured as doing the will of the Lord (God).

The Use of Psalm 110 in the New Testament

Parts of this psalm are quoted or alluded to more times in the New Testament than any other Old Testament passage. Jesus, Peter, Paul and the writer of Hebrews all use it. See Matt. 22:41-46, Mk. 12:35-37, Lk. 20:41-44, Acts 2: 34-35, 5:31, Rom. 8:34, I Cor. 15: 25, Eph. 1:20, Col. 3:1, Heb. 1:13, 5:6, 10, 6:20, 7:11, 15, 17, 21, 8:1, 10:12-13, 12:2, and I Pet. 3:22. Its Messianic character cannot be missed even by the casual reader. This is an excellent example of a psalm with an immediate contextual significance and an ultimate Messianic fulfillment. The psalm is made up of two Messianic oracles – verses 1-3 and verses 4-7. Verse 1 presents the oracle concerning the Messiah at God's right hand and verse 4 presents the oracle concerning the priesthood of the Messiah.

Chronologically, the first New Testament use of this psalm is when Jesus challenged the Pharisees concerning the identity of the Messiah; Matt. 22:41-46, Mk. 12:35-37, and Lk. 20:41-44. This is in the context of a whole series of confrontations which Jesus had with his adversaries. Much of this dealt with the nature of the kingdom, and it was probably with this in mind that Jesus asked his question about the identity of the Christ. It appears that many of his adversaries believe that the Messiah would be an ordinary man executing the roll of a military/political leader. Contrary to this premise, the passage from Psalm 110 shows that "the Lord" was unique, partly because David, his forefather, called him "Lord." Many scholars consider this as a declaration of the divinity of the Messiah.

Earlier, when we looked at this verse from the viewpoint of its historical context we paraphrased the statement as: "The Lord God said to my Lord the king." Now as we look at it from a Messianic viewpoint we can paraphrase it in this way: "The Lord God said to my Lord the Christ, 'sit at my right hand.'" The point that Jesus was making was that David, the writer of the prophecy, was referring to Jesus, his descendant, as the Christ who was, in fact David's son but he was also David's Lord – his Master – who was to sit at the right hand of God. The duration of the Messiah's place at the right hand of God is also stated in verse 1; "until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Therefore Christ will continue to be seated at God's right hand until his last enemy is destroyed. This introduces the question, "Who (what) is the last enemy to be de-

stroyed?" In I Cor. 15:20-26 Paul uses this passage to offer a very important argument concerning the resurrection. His statement is that the last enemy to be conquered will be death, and Christ will reign until this is accomplished. In Acts 2:34-35 Peter uses the first part of this passage to show that Jesus is now reigning at the right hand of God.

In the Old Testament the name of Melchizedek is mentioned only in Gen. 14:18 and Ps. 110:4. The writer of Hebrews gives his basic information in Heb.7:1-10 and he makes his application of this information in Heb. 7:11-28. He makes Melchizedek a major component in support of the high priesthood of Christ. The basis of his argument is that Christ is both king and priest in a similar way as Melchizedek was both king and priest. This was not possible under the Law of Moses because the priests had to be of the tribe of Levi and descendants of Aaron but the Davidic kings came from the tribe of Judah. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah and therefore could not be a priest under the provisions of the Law of Moses. Furthermore since we have no information about either the birth or death of Melchizedek, in a symbolic way he represents the idea of being a priest "forever." This is contrasted with the Levitical priests who served and died and were then replaced by another one who would also serve until he died. Melchizedek's priesthood could symbolize the priest "forever" but the priesthood of Jesus makes this a reality. Jesus is, in fact, a priest forever. The writer of Hebrews concludes that a change in the priesthood necessitates a change in the Law (Heb. 7:12).

Who was Melchizedek?

There are various theories about the identity of Melchizedek. The Jewish Encyclopedia speaks of a "myth" contained in the pseudepigraphic Ethiopian *Book of Adam and Eve* which connected Shem, the son of Noah with Melchizedek. According to this myth, Noah instructed Shem "to take Melchizedek, the son of Canaan, whom God had chosen from all generations of men, and to stand by the dead body of Adam after it had been brought from the ark to Jerusalem as the center of the earth and fulfill the ministry before God. The angel Michael then took away Melchizedek, when fifteen years of age, from his father, and, after having anointed him as priest, brought him to (Jerusalem) the center of the earth, telling his father to share the mystery only with Shem, the son of Noah" (http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10602-melchizedek. Taken from an unsigned article, "Melchizedek," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, online.) According to the myth, young Melchizedek was anointed as a priest and taken to Jerusalem in the care of the angel (Michael). No one knew his whereabouts until his encounter with Abraham. There is no explanation of how Canaan, the mythological father of Melchizedek survived the flood or the idea that the body of Adam had been placed in the ark at the time of the flood.

A Jewish rabbi gives a variation of this story saying that in one of the early Targums, Melchizedek is identified as Shem the son of Noah. According to the ages given in the chronology in Gen. 11ff, Shem lived into the lifetime of Jacob, meaning that he was alive in the days of Abraham. Ephrem of Syria (A.D. 306-373) wrote a commentary on Genesis in which he also presented this idea. (See Rabbi Gutmann in http://www.hebrewroots.com/node/445.) These two curious theories are presented here primarily to demonstrate the speculations among some people concerning the identity of Melchizedek.

Appendices

Appendix "A" Psalms by Book and Category

Book I (Pss 1-41)			Book II (Pss 42-72)			Bk III (Pss 73-89)			Bk V (Pss 107-150)		
Ps#	**Attrib.**	**Category**	**Ps#**	**Attrib.**	**Category**	**Ps#**	**Attrib.**	**Category**	**Ps#**	**Attrib.**	**Category**
1		Wisdom	42/43	Korah	Lam-Indiv	73	Asaph	WisPoem	107		ThnksCmt
2		Royal	44	Korah	LamCmt	74	Asaph	LamCmt	108	David	Misc
3	David	Lam-Ind	45	Korah	Royal	75	Asaph	ThnksCmt	109	David	Lam-Ind
4	David	Lam-Ind	46	Korah	Zion	76	Asaph	Zion	110	David	Royal
5	David	Lam-Ind	47	Korah	YHWH	77	Asaph	Lam-Ind	111		Hymn
6	David	Lam-Ind	48	Korah	Zion	78	Asaph	Misc	112		WisPoem
7	David	Lam-Ind	49	Korah	WisPoem	79	Asaph	LamCmt	113		Hymn
8	David	Hymn	50	Asaph	Misc	80	Asaph	LamCmt	114		Hymn
9	David	ThnksInd	51	David	Lam-Indiv	81	Asaph	Misc	115		TrustCmt
11	David	Trust-Ind	52	David	Lam-Indi	82	Asaph	Misc	116		ThnksInd
12	David	Lam-Cmt	53	David	LamCmt	83	Asaph	LamCmt	117		Hymn
13	David	Lam-Ind	54	David	Lam-Indi	84	Korah	Zion	118		ThnksCmty
14	David	Lam-Cmt	55	David	Lam-Indiv	85	Korah	LamCmt	119		WisPoem
15	David	Misc	56	David	Lam-Indiv	86	David	LamInd	120		Lam-Indiv
16	David	Trust-Ind	57	David	Lam-Indiv	87	Korah	Zion	121		Trust-Indiv
17	David	Lam-Ind	58	David	LamCmt	88	Korah	LamInd	122	David	Zion
18	David	Royal	59	David	Lam-Ind	89	Ethan	LamCmt	123		Lam-Cmty
19	David	Hymn	60	David	Lam-Cmt				124	David	ThnksCmt
20	David	Royal	61	David	Lam-Indiv	**Bk IV (Pss 90-106)**			125		TrustCmt
21	David	Royal	62	David	TrustInd	**Ps#**	**Attrib.**	**Category**	126		Lam-Cmt
22	David	Lam-Ind	63	David	LamInd	90	Moses	LamCmt	127	Solomon	WisPoem
23	David	Trust-Ind	64	David	LamInd	91		TrustInd	128		WisPoem
24	David	Misc	65	David	ThnksCmt	92		ThnksInd	129		Trust-Cmty
25	David	Lam-Ind	66		ThnksCm	93		YHWH	130		Lam-Ind
26	David	Lam-Ind	67		ThnksCmt	94		LamCmt	131	David	Trust-Indiv
27	David	Lam-Ind	68	David	ThnksCmt	95		Misc	132		Royal
28	David	Lam-Ind	69	David	Lam-Indiv	96		YHWH	133	David	Misc
29	David	Hymn	70	David	Lam-Indiv	97		YHWH	134		Misc
30	David	ThnksInd	71		Lam-Indiv	98		YHWH	135		Hymn
31	David	Lam-Ind	72	Solomon	Royal	99		YHWH	136		Hymn
32	David	ThnksInd				100		Hymn	137		Lam-Cmt
33		Hymn				101	David	Royal	138	David	ThanksInd
34	David	ThnksInd				102		LamInd	139	David	Misc
35	David	Lam-Ind				103	David	Hymn	140	David	Lam-Indiv
36	David	Lam-Ind				104		Hymn	141	David	Lam-Indiv
37	David	WisPoem				105		Misc	142	David	Lam-Indiv
38	David	Lam-Ind				106		LamCmt	143	David	Lam-Indiv
39	David	Lam-Ind							144	David	Royal
40	David	Lam-Ind							145	David	Hymn
41	David	Thanks							146		Hymn
									147		Hymn
									148		Hymn
									149		Hymn
									150		Hymn

Appendix "B" Chart B--Chart of Psalms by Category

Hymn

Ps#	Attrib.	Category
8	David&	Hymn
19	David	Hymn
29	David	Hymn
33	.	Hymn
100	.	Hymn
103	David	Hymn
104	.	Hymn
*111	.	Hymn
113	.	Hymn
114	.	Hymn
117	.	Hymn
135	.	Hymn
136	.	Hymn
*145	David	Hymn
146	.	Hymn
147	.	Hymn
148	.	Hymn
149	.	Hymn
150	.	Hymn

Miscellaneous

Ps#	Attrib.	Category
15	David	Misc
24	David	Misc
50	Asaph	Misc
78	Asaph	Misc
81	Asaph&	Misc
82	Asaph	Misc
95	.	Misc
105	.	Misc
108	David	Misc
133	David	Misc
134	.	Misc
139	David	Misc

Lament-Commuity

Ps#	Attrib.	Category
12	David&	Lam-Cmty
14	David	Lam-Cmty
44	Korah	Lam-Cmty
53	David&	Lam-Cmty
58	David&	Lam-Cmty
60	David&	Lam-Cmty
74	Asaph	Lam-Cmty
79	Asaph	Lam-Cmty
80	Asaph&	Lam-Cmty
83	Asaph	Lam-Cmty
85	Korah	Lam-Cmty
89	Ethan	Lam-Cmty
90	Moses	Lam-Cmty
94	.	Lam-Cmty
106	.	Lam-Cmty
123	.	Lam-Cmty
126	.	Lam-Cmty
137	.	Lam-Cmty

Royal

Ps#	Attrib.	Category
2	.	Royal
18	David&	Royal
20	David	Royal
21	David	Royal
45	Korah&	Royal
72	Solomon	Royal
101	David	Royal
110	David	Royal
132	.	Royal
144	David	Royal

Lament-Individual

Ps#	Attrib.	Category
3	David&	Lam-Indiv
4	David&	Lam-Indiv
5	David&	Lam-Indiv
6	David&	Lam-Indiv
7	David&	Lam-Indiv
13	David	Lam-Indiv
17	David	Lam-Indiv
22	David&	Lam-Indiv
*25	David	Lam-Indiv
26	David	Lam-Indiv
27	David	Lam-Indiv
28	David	Lam-Indiv
31	David	Lam-Indiv
35	David	Lam-Indiv
36	David&	Lam-Indiv
38	David&	Lam-Indiv
39	David&	Lam-Indiv
40	David	Lam-Indiv
42/43	Korah	Lam-Indiv
51	David&	Lam-Indiv
52	David&	Lam-Indiv

Lament-Individual

Ps#	Attrib.	Category
54	David&	Lam-Indiv
55	David&	Lam-Indiv
56	David&	Lam-Indiv
57	David&	Lam-Indiv
59	David&	Lam-Indiv
61	David&	Lam-Indiv
63	David&	Lam-Indiv
64	David	Lam-Indiv
69	David&	Lam-Indiv
70	David&	Lam-Indiv
71	.	Lam-Indiv
77	Asaph&	Lam-Indiv
86	David	Lam-Indiv
88	Korah&	Lam-Indiv
102	&	Lam-Indiv
109	David	Lam-Indiv
120	.	Lam-Indiv
130	.	Lam-Indiv
140	David	Lam-Indiv
141	David	Lam-Indiv
142	David&	Lam-Indiv
143	David	Lam-Indiv

Wisdom

Ps#	Attrib.	Category
1	.	Wisdom
*37	David	WisPoem
49	Korah	WisPoem
73	Asaph	WisPoem
*112	.	WisPoem
*119	.	WisPoem
127	Solomon	WisPoem
128	.	WisPoem

The Lord-Zion

Ps#	Attrib.	Category
47	Korah	YHWH
93	.	YHWH
96	.	YHWH
97	.	YHWH
98	.	YHWH
99	.	YHWH
46	Korah&	Zion
48	Korah	Zion
76	Asaph&	Zion
84	Korah&	Zion
87	Korah	Zion
122	David	Zion

Thanks-Community

Ps#	Attrib.	Category
65	David	Thanks-Cmty
66	.	Thanks-Cmty
67	&	Thanks-Cmty
68	David	Thanks-Cmty
75	Asaph&	Thanks-Cmty
107	.	Thanks-Cmty
118	.	Thanks-Cmty
124	David	Thanks-Cmty

Thanks-Individual

Ps#	Attrib.	Category
*9/10	David&	Thanks-Indiv
30	David	Thanks-Indiv
32	David	Thanks-Indiv
*34	David&	Thanks-Indiv
41	David	Thanks-Indiv
92	.	Thanks-Indiv
116	.	Thanks-Indiv
138	David	Thanks-Indiv

Trust-Community-Individual

Ps#	Attrib.	Category
115	.	Trust-Cmty
125	.	Trust-Cmty
129	.	Trust-Cmty
11	David	Trust-Indiv
16	David	Trust-Indiv
23	David	Trust-Indiv
62	David&	Trust-Indiv
91	.	Trust-Indiv
121	.	Trust-Indiv
131	David	Trust-Indiv

An "&" sign next to the name of the composer indicates that the supesrscription has additional infomration.

Bibliography

Bibliography

Albright, William F. *The Archaeology of Palestine*, revised edition, (Baltimore: Penguin Books), 1960.

Allen, Leslie C. *Word Bible Commentaries: Psalms 101-150,* Vol. 20, (Dallas: Word Book Publishing Company), 1983.

Bettenson, Henry. *Documents of the Christian Church,* 2nd edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1963.

Craigie, Peter. *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50*, Vol. 19, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publishing Company), 1983.

Harvey, Dorothea W. "The Literary Forms of the Old Testament," in *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible,* Charles M. Laymon, editor, (New York: Abingdon Press), 1971.

Hempel, Johannes. "The Book of Psalms," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* George A. Buttrick, editor, (New York: Abingdon Press), 1962.

Hirsch, Emil G. Online. (http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6693-gittith.)

Jones, Edgar. *The Greatest Old Testament Words*, (London: SCM Press), 1964.

Keil, C.F. and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Psalms.* Vol. 5. 10 volumes. (Hendrickson Publishers New Updated Edition, Electronic Database), 1996.

Kidner, Derek. Psalms 1-72, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: An Introduction and Commentatry*, (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press), 1973.

Kolatch, Alfred J. Online. *The Jewish Book of Why* and *The Second Jewish Book of Why*, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Original_Sin.html, (New York: Jonathan David Publishers), 1989.

Kraus, Hans-Joachim. *Theology of the Psalms*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 1992.

Latourette, Kenneth S. *A History of Christianity*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1953).

Lust, Johan and Erik Eynikel, *Greek English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Revised Edition, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart) 2003.

Mays, James L. *Psalms*: *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville: John Knox Press), 1989.

McCullough, Stewart. *The Interpreter's Bible*: Vol. IV, The Book of Psalms, (New York: Abingdon Press), 1955.

Miller, Patrick D. Jr. *Interpreting the Psalms*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973).
Mounce, William D. *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2006.

Murphy, Roland. *The Jerome Bible Commentary: The Psalms,* Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy, editors. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall), 1968.

Oesterley, W.O.E. *The Psalms*, (London: SPCK), 1959.

Perowne, J. Stewart. *The Book of Psalms: Explanatory and Critical.* Two Volumes complete in one. (Grand Rapids: 1878), reprinted 1966.

Petersen, Allen R. "Enthronement Festivals in Ancient Israel and Ugarit?" in *The Royal God*, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd), 1998.

Rhodes, Arnold B. *The Layman's Bible Commentary: The Book of Psalms*, vol. 9, (Richmond Virginia: John Knox Press), 1960.

Robinson, Theodore H. "The History of Israel" in *The Interpreter's Bible,* George Buttrick, editor, vol. 1 (New York: Abingdon Press), 1952.

Scott, R.B.Y. *The Psalms as Christian Praise*, (New York: Association Press), 1958.

Tate, Marvin E. *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 51-100*, Vol. 20, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher), 1998.

Taylor, William R. *The Interpreter's Bible: The Book of Psalms,* Vol. IV, (New York: Abingdon Press), 1955.

Toombs, Lawrence E. *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible: The Psalms*, Charles M. Laymon, editor, (New York: Abingdon Press), 1971.

VanderKam, James C. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids), 1994.

Westermann, Claus. *The Praise of God in Psalms*, second edition, (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press), 1965.

Willis, John. "How the Psalms are Important in Preaching," *Leaven*, vol. 19, quarter 3, D'Esta Love and Stuart Love, editors, (Malibu: Pepperdine University), 2011.

Unsigned article. "Judaism's Rejection of Original Sin," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, (The Jewish Virtual Library, The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise).